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"Our Hunting Fathers" by Benjamin Britten and W. H. Auden: A musical and textual analysis

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The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1994

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OUR HUNTING FATHERS BY BENJAMIN BRITTEN AND W. H. AUDEN: A MUSICAL AND TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

by

Celeste Mildred Emmons

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
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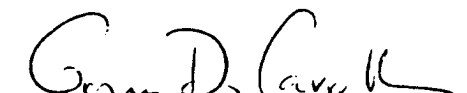

Dissertation Advisor

EMMONS, CELESTE MILDRED, D.M.A. Our Hunting Fathers by Benjamin Britten and W. H. Auden: A Musical and Textual Analysis. (1994)
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The purpose of this study was to provide a detailed and extensive analysis of the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers, by Benjamin Britten, for high voice and orchestra, op. 8, devised by the poet W. H. Auden. Although Britten was pleased with Our Hunting Fathers, the song cycle's satirical and innovative nature caused it to be unfavorably received by the conservative English musical establishment, and Our Hunting Fathers has never gained the recognition which its inherent musical qualities merit.

The analysis of this song cycle includes a precis of the lives of Britten and Auden as well as a concise history of the creation and premiere of Our Hunting Fathers. The specific focus of this research is on the text and music of the cycle. The analysis of the text begins with an overview of Auden's works and style and of the way he uses animals in his writings, followed by an analysis of the individual poems. The analysis reveals that the "Prologue" and "Epilogue" to the song cycle establish the premise that animals have inspired man's artistic and social achievements, yet they envy man for his ability to reason and sacrifice himself for the good

of society. The inner three poems, adapted by Auden from Renaissance and Medieval sources, show how man at different times fears, loves, and despises animals.

The analysis of the music begins with an overview of Britten's works and style. This analysis of Our Hunting Fathers shows how melody, harmony, rhythm, dynamics and texture, including vocal and instrumental writing, enhance the meaning of the text. Motivic and melodic analyses reveal a tightly unified cycle. The modal ambiguity of the motto theme, appearing in each song of the cycle, as well as the lack of tonal closure at the end of the last piece, mirror the political uncertainties of the day. Britten parodies conventional tonality and existing musical forms such as recitative, hunting songs, and Gregorian Chant to satirize the cruel, unenlightened treatment of animals and of human beings in 1930s Europe.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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I would like to thank Boosey & Hawkes for their gracious permission to reprint excerpts from the score of Our Hunting Fathers, copyright 1936 by Hawkes & Son (London) Ltd.

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permission to quote from Benjamin Britten, Letters from a Life: Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten, volume 1,1923-1939 , and volume 2,1939-1945, Edited and Translated by Donald Mitchell, Copyright (c) 1991 Trustees of the Britten-Pears Foundation, (c) Britten Estate Ltd.

Finally, I would like to thank my father, Frank Ellsworth Emmons; my brother, Charles Emmons; and my mother, the late Mildred Ruth Emmons, without whose love, support and encouragement I could not have successfully completed this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Britten is widely considered to be one of the century's foremost composers, especially of vocal music. Although much has been written about Britten's mature vocal works, including his operas, the canticles, and song cycles such as Serenade and the Donne Sonnets, some of his earlier works, including Our Hunting Fathers, Britten's song cycle for high voice and orchestra, op. 8., devised by the poet W. H. Auden, have received less attention from scholars and performers. The leading Britten scholar Donald Mitchell has called Our Hunting Fathers "one of the most brilliant and original of all Britten's compositions."[1] Britten himself thought that Our Hunting Fathers was perhaps the most successful of his collaborations with W. H. Auden, which, in addition to Our Hunting Fathers, included films, plays, the operetta Paul Bunyan, the choral work Ode to St. Cecilia, the song cycle On This Island and four Cabaret Songs. After hearing Our Hunting Fathers performed, Britten said that it was his

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[1]Donald Mitchell, note to Our Hunting Fathers, REGL 417, BBC Records, 1981.

"Opus 1, alright [sic]," meaning that he felt he had finally found his voice as a composer.[2]

Our Hunting Fathers is a stunning achievement for a twenty-two-year-old composer who had only written one other work for full orchestra.[3] In this cycle, Britten wrote imaginatively and with virtuosity, exploiting a wide range of the voice and orchestra's capabilities in an array of bold and innovative techniques. Britten's harmonic language and use of motives were also innovative. The harmony in this cycle is pandiatonic, including many tertian sonorities which often do not resolve in the expected manner. Britten used several musical motives in more than one song to unify the cycle, sometimes altering their rhythm or intervallic content or juxtaposing them to create interesting sonorities, but not developing them in an organic way as the composers of the Classical or Romantic period would have done.

Britten wrote Our Hunting Fathers in the spring and summer of 1936. The song cycle was first performed by soprano Sophie Wyss and the London Philharmonic Orchestra, with Britten conducting, at the Norfolk and Norwich Triennial Music Festival on September 25, 1936. The

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[2]Humphrey Carpenter, Benjamin Britten: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 103.

[3]This was the early song cycle, Quatre Chansons Franaises, which Britten wrote at age fourteen.

reviews were, for the most part, unfavorable. Reviewers criticized the avant-garde nature of the piece and the virtuosity of Britten's orchestral and vocal writing; these were not popular traits within the English musical establishment of the day.[4] Although Our Hunting Fathers was broadcast on BBC radio in 1937, the work subsequently slid into obscurity and was not revived until June 1950 at the Chelsea Town Hall with Peter Pears and the Chelsea Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Norman Del Mar.[5] Our Hunting Fathers has been recorded by Pears and later by artists such as Phyllis Bryn-Julson and Elisabeth Sšderstršm, but it is still not nearly so well-known or so frequently performed as many of Britten's other song cycles.

W. H. Auden wrote the poetry for the first and last songs of the cycle, the "Prologue" and the "Epilogue." In these two poems, Auden comments on the relationships between animals and human beings, discussing ways in which they have influenced each other throughout history. According to Auden, the animals have inspired humans with

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[4]Donald Mitchell, ed., Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), vol. 1, 1923-1939, 444-449.

[5]Donald Mitchell, ed., Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), vol. 1, 1923-1939, 449.

their passion, love, and innocence. At the same time, the animals envy the ability of humans to reason and the power that comes from that ability. The central three songs of Our Hunting Fathers, adapted by Auden from earlier texts, illustrate three different types of relationships between human beings and animals. "Rats Away!," adapted by Auden from an anonymous Medieval text, is a prayer intended to drive off rats. In the second poem, "Messalina," another anonymous text modernized by Auden, a woman weeps for her pet monkey, which is dying. The third of these texts, "Hawking for the Partridge" (renamed "Dance of Death" in the song cycle), is by the madrigalist Thomas Ravenscroft (c. 1592-1635), who also set it to music. In this song, human beings hunt partridge, assisted by their kites and dogs in the sport of falconry. The animals in these three poems have been traditionally linked in Western culture with certain qualities, such as evil, lasciviousness, greed, and love and are on this level symbolic of various attributes of the human psyche.

The poetry and music of this song cycle, which was written during the turbulent time between the two world wars, also have political significance. During the 1930s, fascism was a powerful force in Europe. Mussolini had ruled Italy since the 1920s, and Adolf Hitler became the chancellor of Germany in 1933. In 1936, the fascist dictator Franco attempted to seize power in Spain,

precipitating the Spanish Civil War. Britten and Auden were aware of the militaristic and oppressive nature of the fascist regimes, which they strenuously opposed. Auden, who for awhile had believed that man's instincts were inherently good and that all evil came from repression of these instincts, was forced to revise his opinions as he became aware of the destructive role which violent, unbridled human instincts had played in the regimes of Hitler, Mussolini and Franco. Auden turned first to Marxism, and then to Christianity, as means for controlling man's destructive nature. Auden comments on these issues in his "Prologue" and "Epilogue" to Our Hunting Fathers as well as in his selection of the inner three poems from existing sources.

Britten's diaries and letters from the time during which he was composing Our Hunting Fathers are full of references to the Spanish Civil War and to the current Ethiopian conflict, in which Mussolini was attempting to colonize the empire of Haile Selassie.[6] Britten had been a pacifist all his life and had always opposed cruelty in every form. He had compassion not only for his fellow human beings, but also for animals. At his preparatory school, South Lodge, in Lowestoft, he wrote an essay on

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[6]Donald Mitchell, ed., Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), vol. 1, 1923-1939, passim.

animals which turned into a condemnation of hunting and war, which have been linked in literature and thought since ancient times. Britten's essay, according to musicologist Wilbur Maust, establishes an early link between these two concerns in Britten's mind and suggests that Our Hunting Fathers is, at least in part, a political work in which the treatment of animals by humans symbolizes humans' treatment of one another.[7]

Status of Related Research

To date, no dissertation has been written solely on Our Hunting Fathers. John Wells Jennings has discussed the work along with On This Island, Hymn to St. Cecilia, and the Spring Symphony, in his dissertation, The Influence of W. H. Auden on Benjamin Britten. Jennings has pointed out two major melodic themes which help unify the cycle. He has shown how these themes are transformed, melodically and rhythmically, and harmonized differently at some points in the work.[8] In fact, many authors have acknowledged the most important theme, which consists of a descending major triad followed by a scalar ascent to a

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[7]Wilbur Maust, Benjamin Britten's Music of Conscience and Compassion (Waterloo, Ontario: Conrad Grebel College, 1987).

[8]John Wells Jennings, The Influence of W. H. Auden on Benjamin Britten (D.M.A. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1979), 40-75.

minor third above the tonic (A-F#-D-E-F in its first statement). George Tibbetts has analyzed the relationship of text to music in "Rats Away" in his dissertation, An Analysis of the Text-Music Relationship in Selected Songs of Benjamin Britten and Its Implications for the Interpretation of His Solo Song Literature. Tibbetts emphasizes the manner in which Britten's music corresponds to the accentuation of the text. He also points out major aspects of tonality and orchestration in relation to text-setting.[9] Donald Mitchell has written a chapter on Our Hunting Fathers in his book, Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936. In this chapter, he discusses the creation of the work, briefly cites the main musical features of each song, and suggests possible political implications to the songs "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death."[10] Peter Evans has included a short analysis of Our Hunting Fathers in his book, The Music of Benjamin Britten. He indicates three important motives which appear in different songs and help to unify the cycle and

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[9]George Tibbetts, An Analysis of the Text-Music Relationship in Selected Songs of Benjamin Britten and Its Implications for the Interpretation of His Solo Song Literature (Ed.D. diss., Columbia University Teachers College, 1984), 47-55.

[10]Donald Mitchell, "Our Hunting Fathers: Abroad and at Home," in Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 19-56.

discusses tonality and structure on a broad scale.[11] Christopher Palmer briefly discusses innovative elements in the orchestration of the cycle in a chapter of The Britten Companion.[12] Stephen Banfield, the author of Sensibility and English Song, acknowledges that Our Hunting Fathers is a highly original and powerful piece, but criticizes it for structural flaws and lack of control. The songs "Rats Away" and "Messalina" are especially criticized. The former is too simple harmonically and the latter is excessive in its pathos.[13] Michael Kennedy, author of Britten, is more favorable in his assessment of the form of Our Hunting Fathers. Kennedy briefly discusses vocal and instrumental textures and the character of each piece.[14] Peter Pears in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works from a Group of Specialists discusses the virtuosity and innovative nature of the vocal writing, which varies from recitative in the Prologue to a reciting tone in "Rats Away" to

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[11]Peter Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1979), 68-73.

[12]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works: Britten as Instrumentalist," in The Britten Companion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 395-402, 406.

[13]Stephen Banfield, "Sensibility and English Song: Critical Studies of the Early 20th Century" (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 382-83, 385-88.

[14]Michael Kennedy, Britten, The Master Musicians Series (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1981), 136-39.

melismas and sostenuto writing in the three inner pieces. Pears believes that the music in this cycle conveys the overall mood of the text but does not become subservient to the individual words as it does in many other songs of the day. Pears also points out the tonal conflict between the Prologue and Epilogue, which are in C minor, and the three inner songs, which are all in D major or D minor.[15] In a three-page article, Barbara Docherty has compared Our Hunting Fathers to Britten's last opera, Death in Venice. The writer Aschenbach in Death in Venice completes himself by absorbing Dionysian (passionate, feeling) elements into his formerly Apollonian (orderly, thinking) personality, but the animals in Our Hunting Fathers, she states, envy humans' capacity for rational thought and would like to take on Apollonian aspects.[16] Donald Mitchell's annotated edition of the diaries and letters of Benjamin Britten contain the text of reviews, Britten's program notes for the first performance, and letters and diary entries written during the creation of the work.

Since the poems "Messalina" and "Rats Away!" were written by anonymous authors, and the poem "Hawking for the Partridge," which Auden renamed "Dance of Death" for

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[15]Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works from a Group of Specialists (New York: Philosophical Library, 1952), 60-63.

[16]Barbara Docherty, "Aschenbach's Wilderness," Tempo 157 (June 1986): 9-11.

the song cycle, is by Thomas Ravenscroft, who is known primarily as a composer rather than as a poet, these three poems have drawn no comment other than a brief mention from writers analyzing the music of the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers. Much more material is available on the "Prologue" and the "Epilogue," which were written by Auden himself. Several books on Auden briefly analyze the words of the "Prologue" (called "The Creatures" in Auden's Collected Poems) and the "Epilogue" (called in the Collected Poems by its first line, "Our hunting fathers told the story"). These include Auden: An Introductory Essay by Richard Hoggart, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island by Monroe K. Spears, W. H. Auden by Stan Smith, and Early Auden by Edward Mendelson. These authors view the animals primarily as symbols of aspects of the human consciousness. Some interpret "The Creatures" as a political statement about the failure of the liberal tradition in England. Smith views the "Creatures" as amoral impulses of our subconscious. Since these impulses are often contradictory, we are forced to await "the extraordinary compulsion of the deluge and the earthquake" to be able to express our desires. The deluge, says Smith, was a recurrent theme in leftist writing of the 1930s, when writers feared that another war

would put an end to the culture that they knew.[17] Smith writes that the epilogue, "Our hunting fathers told the story," is an expression of the failure of tradition and patriarchy. The individual is isolated, hence the final line: "To hunger, work illegally, and be anonymous" (a quotation from Lenin, who thought that individuals should become indifferent to their own needs for comfort and companionship in order to properly serve the state).[18] Monroe K. Spears contrasts the two stanzas of "Our hunting fathers told the story" one to another. The first, he states, describes "the older, self-assured tradition which pitied the animals for their lack of reason," and the second "the modern situation in which the goal of love must be the imitation of animal qualities, but without the essential one, their innocence."[19] Richard Hoggart, in his analysis of "Our hunting fathers told the story," contrasts the reference to liberal tradition in the first stanza with the cold reality of the second stanza in which man must "hunger, work illegally, and be anonymous." Hoggart says that we forsake "the liberal and humane in our social dealings for the evasive, the treacherous, the

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[17]Stan Smith, W. H. Auden (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 76-78.

[18]Smith, 33-34.

[19]Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 116.

sly," and imitate "by choice the cunning of the animals."[20] Mendelson views the prologue, "The Creatures," as Auden's yearning for an innocent past and future, for Eden and Utopia. The unspoiled animals serve as a model for fallen and divided man.[21] Unlike Docherty, Mendelson believes that the epilogue, "Our hunting fathers told the story," is about love's contamination by guilt and reason, not about animals wanting to take on human qualities.[22]

Procedures

The first chapter will contain information on Auden and Britten in the context of their time and describe the steps in the creation and the premiere of the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers in 1936. Important sources for this chapter will include the various biographies on Britten, especially the latest biography by Humphrey Carpenter; the selected diaries and letters of Benjamin Britten edited by Donald Mitchell; the biographies of Auden by Humphrey Carpenter and Charles Osborne; Donald Mitchell's book, Britten and Auden in the Thirties; and various books on

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[20]Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 101-3.

[21]Edward Mendelson, Early Auden (New York: Viking, 1981), 190-93.

[22]Mendelson, 214-16.

Europe in the 1930s listed in the bibliography. This first chapter will be rather brief but detailed enough so as to provide the necessary historical perspective for the textual and musical analyses in Chapters II and III.

Chapter Two will contain an analysis of the text of Our Hunting Fathers. This chapter will begin with a brief description of Auden's style and oeuvre and the ways in which Auden used animals in his poetry and plays. Material for this discussion will be drawn from Auden's poems and plays from the 1930s and from several books on Auden, including the biographies by Osborne and Carpenter and Early Auden by Edward Mendelson. An analysis of the poetry of the cycle will follow. In the analysis of the text, psychological and social factors will be stressed. Ways in which the relationships between humans and animals could be symbolic of relationships among humans will be discussed, as well as ways in which animals could represent parts of the human psyche. Information on hunting customs and historical attitudes toward animals in literature will be given in order to add to the reader's understanding of the middle three poems. This information will be drawn from several books in the bibliography on hunting and animal lore. The "Prologue" and the "Epilogue" will be examined for what they reveal about Auden's attitude toward animals and possibly toward himself. A summary of the existing analyses of these two

poems will be given as well as further suggestions for interpretation. Support for these suggestions will be drawn from biographies and critical studies of Auden and also from writings of Auden which concern themselves with animals, such as The Dog beneath the Skin, written with Christopher Isherwood, and his libretto for Benjamin Britten's operetta Paul Bunyan. A discussion of Auden's "Prologue" and "Epilogue" and of his selection of the inner poems for this cycle in relation to his life and other works has not yet been published. Also, no previous published analysis of these songs has included a discussion of the psychology of man's attitude toward animals, man's tendency to project human characteristics onto animals and his tendency to use animals as symbols for certain human qualities in fiction.

Chapter Four will consist of a discussion of Britten's musical setting of the text. A brief section on Britten's output and style will be followed by general comments about Our Hunting Fathers and then by more detailed analyses of the individual songs. The length of this document will permit discussion of harmony, vocal writing, and melodic writing (including the transformation of motives) on a more detailed scale than has been possible for those authors who have analyzed the cycle only as a part of a larger work on Britten's music. In this analysis of Our Hunting Fathers, features of melody,

harmony, rhythm, dynamics and texture, including vocal and instrumental writing, will be examined for their own importance as well as for their significance in text-setting.

CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Auden's Life

Wystan Hugh Auden was born on February 21, 1907, in the city of York in northern England, the youngest of three boys. In 1908, when Wystan was one- and one-half years old, his family moved south to Solihull, a large village close to the city of Birmingham.[1]

Wystan was the favorite son of his mother, Constance Bicknell Auden, who lavished great attention on him. She taught him how to play the piano, and they sang duets together. When he was eight years old, she taught him the love-potion scene from Tristan und Isolde by Wagner, and they sang this duet together, with Wystan taking the part of Isolde.[2] Auden's mother, however, could be very domineering and disapproving, and there came to be great tension between them as Auden grew older, although they remained extremely close.[3]

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[1]Humphrey Carpenter, W. H. Auden: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 3-5; Charles Osborne, W. H. Auden: The Life of a Poet (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1979), 10.

[2]Carpenter, Auden, 11; Osborne, 11.

[3]Carpenter, Auden, 6, 41, 50.

Auden later attributed much of his adult character to his mother's influence. He attributed his homosexuality to the close relationship he had with his mother; he felt that he identified with her too much. He did believe, however, that the traumatic relationship between them helped to develop his intellectual faculties.[4] He once said that "I think we shall find that all intelligent people are the product of psychological conflict in childhood."[5]

His father, George Augustus Auden, a doctor, was well-educated in the humanities as well as the sciences and tended not to distinguish rigidly between the two. The young Auden enjoyed reading books from his father's excellent library. In later life, he said, "in my father's library, scientific books stood side by side with works of poetry and fiction, and it never occurred to me to think of one as being less or more 'humane' than the other."[6]

When Wystan was young, his father told him stories from Greek mythology, as well as Icelandic legends. Dr.

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[4]Carpenter, Auden, 11-12.

[5]W. H. Auden, The English Auden, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977; reprinted New York: Random House, 1978), 359; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 12.

[6]W. H. Auden, Forewords and Afterwords (New York: Random House, 1973), 497; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 8.

Auden believed that his family was descended from Norse settlers in Iceland and therefore was very fond of these stories. Wystan shared this enthusiasm, which he retained all his life.[7] Wystan later described himself a "pure Nordic,"[8] and said, "in my childhood dreams Iceland was holy ground."[9]

In 1914, World War I broke out, and Auden's father enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps. Dr. Auden was away from home for four years, during which time Wystan hardly saw him at all. Mrs. Auden sent Wystan away to boarding school, packed up the family's belongings, and sold their house. She went to live with relatives during the year and joined the boys during holidays in trips to different parts of the country, including the northern part of England, where they visited impressive limestone deposits, caverns, and abandoned lead mines.[10] Auden wrote later that

> I spent a great many of my waking hours in the construction and elaboration of a private sacred world, the basic elements of which were a

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[7]Carpenter, Auden, 7-8.

[8]Auden, Forewords and Afterwords, 496; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 8.

[9]W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, Letters from Iceland, 2nd ed. (London: Faber and Faber, 1967),8; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 8.

[10]Carpenter, Auden, 13-14.

> landscape, northern and limestone, and an industry, lead mining.[11]

Although Auden believed at this time that he would become a mining engineer, his interest in mines and machinery was more romantic than practical, and he later became, instead, a poet.[12]

In the fall of 1915, Auden entered St. Edmund's School at Hindhead in Surrey. There Wystan had to contend with temperamental schoolmasters who sometimes beat or sexually abused their pupils. The boys were forced to take part in the Officers' Training Corps, where they played war games while many of the boys' fathers were dying in the real war.[13]

Wystan dealt with this situation by behaving in a self-confident, detached matter. On his first day of school, he told the matron that "I like to see the various types of boys."[14] He was perceived by the schoolmasters as being untidy, lazy, and rude. He enjoyed impressing his schoolmates with his knowledge; at age ten, he gave his fellow students a lecture on the Great Schism. He

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[11]Auden, Forewords and Afterwords, 502; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 14.

[12]Carpenter, 14-15.

[13]Carpenter, Auden, 16-18.

[14]Stephen Spender, ed., W. H. Auden: A Tribute (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 35; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 18-19.

also impressed them with his familiarity with the facts of life, which he had gained from his father's medical manuals.[15]

In September 1920, Wystan was sent to Gresham's School at Holt in Norfolk.[16] At Gresham's there was an Honour Code in which the students were encouraged to inform on each other; any smoking, swearing, or "indecency" was to be reported to the housemasters.[17] Auden later wrote, "the best reason I have for opposing Fascism is that at school I lived in a Fascist state."[18]

It was at Gresham's that Auden met Robert Medley, a fellow pupil who encouraged Auden to write poetry. Auden's first attempts at poetry were pastiches of the work of poets such as Wordsworth, W. H. Davie, A.E. [G. W. Russell], Walter de la Mare, Robert Frost, Thomas Hardy, and A. E. Housman. By 1924, however, Auden had begun to develop an individual style.[19]

In the fall of 1925, Auden entered Christ Church, Oxford, where, free of the repression of Gresham's, Auden began to indulge in promiscuous activity from which the

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[15]Carpenter, Auden, 19-21.

[16]Carpenter, Auden, 22-23.

[17]Carpenter, Auden, 25-26; Osborne, 22-23.

[18]Auden, The English Auden, 325; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 26.

[19]Carpenter, Auden, 29-41.

emotional element was usually absent.[20] In general, Auden's personality showed an enormous energy and a lack of restraint. He was known among the undergraduates for his "amazing intellectual ebullience" and "rapid, voluble conversation."[21] By now, Auden was starting to become aware of the true extent of his intellectual gifts, and he often stated his opinions loudly and dogmatically. Although he was emphatic about his beliefs, he changed his mind frequently. Auden also had a humble side, however. One friend who saw beneath Auden's showy exterior said that he was "really very kind and quite simple."[22]

At college Auden renewed his acquaintance with Christopher Isherwood, whom he had known at preparatory school. He also met Stephen Spender and Cecil Day-Lewis. All three of these men were writers of whose work Auden approved. Auden began to see himself and these three men as members of a group of young artists which he called "The Gang." Auden looked upon himself as the leader of this literary group which was to become famous during the 1930s.[23]

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[20]Carpenter, Auden, 47-50.

[21]Carpenter, Auden, 43.

[22]Carpenter, Auden, 67-68.

[23]Carpenter, Auden, 75.

After graduating from Oxford in 1928, Auden went to Berlin for a year, where he met and became friends with a mentally unstable man named John Layard. Layard believed that humans were, by nature, good, but they were led into error when they attempted to repress their instinctual desires. Layard was partly influenced by the writer D. H. Lawrence, who believed that one should live according to one's spontaneous urges rather than by intellectualizing.[24] Auden was later to write to a friend, "real poetry originates in the guts and only flowers in the head," and to another friend, "never write from your head . . . Unless the original impulse comes from the guts and gives you a nice warm feeling up the spine, it is cerebral and bogus."[25]

D. H. Lawrence also believed that the common man and woman should not involve themselves with politics, but that they should look to a leader to save society from its ills: in other words, a dictator. Auden for a while was seduced by these ideas of Lawrence, which were essentially fascist, incorporating them into his long work, The Orators, written after he had returned to England.[26]

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[24]Carpenter, Auden, 85-88.

[25]Carpenter, Auden, 118.

[26]Carpenter, Auden, 120-30; Osborne, 91-93.

Back in England, Auden supported himself for awhile by teaching at private academies for boys. In 1932, he began to write for an experimental group called the Group Theatre. Around this time, his writings began to become more political, specifically Marxist, in character. Auden was influenced by his friends Stephen Spender and Cecil Day-Lewis who began to embrace communist views in their writings. One reason that these intellectuals were turning to communism was that the British Labour Party was becoming more politically conservative and the Communist Party was therefore the only hope they saw for correcting the "vast economic injustices of the Depression."[27] Auden never actually became a member of the English Communist Party, however. To a friend he wrote: "I am a bourgeois. I shall not join the C. P."[28]

In the summer of 1933, Auden fell in love with a man much younger than himself. Unlike during his years at Oxford, Auden now was becoming more willing to love someone deeply. This erotic love (Eros) broadened into a love for his fellow human beings in general (Agape).[29] One night when talking with colleagues out on the school

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[27]Carpenter, Auden, 147-48.

[28]Carpenter, Auden, 153.

[29]Carpenter, Auden, 160.

lawn, Auden had an experience which changed his life:

> One fine summer night in June 1933 I was sitting on a lawn after dinner with three colleagues, two women and one man. We liked each other well enough but we were certainly not intimate friends, nor had any one of us a sexual interest in another. Incidentally, we had not drunk any alcohol. We were talking casually about everyday matters when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, something happened. I felt myself invaded by a power which, though I consented to it, was irresistible and certainly not mine. For the first time in my life I knew exactly - because, thanks to the power, I was doing it - what it means to love one's neighbour as oneself . . .
>
> I recalled with shame the many occasions on which I had been spiteful, snobbish, selfish, but the immediate joy was greater than the shame, for I knew that, so long as I was possessed by this spirit, it would be literally impossible for me deliberately to injure another human being. I also knew that the power would, of course, be withdrawn sooner or later and that, when it did, my greeds and self-regard would return . . . . The memory of the experience has not prevented me from making use of others, grossly and often, but it has made it much more difficult for me to deceive myself about what I am up to when I do.[30]

In 1935, Auden chivalrously married Erika Mann, the daughter of the renowned novelist Thomas Mann, in order that she might become an English citizen and escape the menacing Nazi regime in Germany. Auden and Erika never lived together, but they became good friends.[31] In that same year, Auden took a job at the General Post Office (G.

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[30]Auden, Forewords and Afterwords, 69-70; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 160-61.

[31]Carpenter, Auden, 175-77, 187; Osborne, 109.

P. O.) Film Unit, where he wrote narration for the exciting and innovative documentary films Coal Face and Night Mail.

During 1935 and 1936, Auden collaborated with his friend Christopher Isherwood on two successful plays for the Group Theatre, The Dog beneath the Skin and The Ascent of F6. In 1936, Auden also worked with Benjamin Britten on the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers. Later in the year, Auden went to Iceland to work on a travel book with the writer Louis MacNeice, Letters from Iceland. While he was there, he heard of the outbreak of civil war in Spain.[32]

In 1937, after having returned to England, Auden left for Spain to volunteer to drive an ambulance for the Republican side. It was a disillusioning experience for him, however. Although Auden never saw much fighting and apparently did not actually drive an ambulance (some people have speculated that the government was wary of Auden's erratic driving), he did see things about the Republican government which disturbed him greatly, such as their persecution of the clergy.[33]

In 1938, Auden went with Christopher Isherwood to China to write about the Sino-Japanese War, which was then taking place. Largely as a result of his experiences in

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[32]Carpenter, Auden, 197-202.

[33]Osborne, 131-137.

Spain and in China, Auden began to lose faith in Marxism as a political system and in politics altogether. This disillusionment played a large role in Auden's decision to emigrate to America where he hoped to cast off the mantle of leader of the English literary left and make a fresh start.[34] In his philosophical prose work, The Prolific and the Devourer, Auden was to state that he and his fellow writers had been powerless to effect social change and that "the political history of the world would have been the same if not a poem had been written, not a picture painted nor a bar of music composed."[35]

Auden arrived in New York with his friend Christopher Isherwood in 1939. At a poetry reading there in April, Auden met the young writer Chester Kallman, who was then a student at Brooklyn College.[36] Kallman and Auden began a friendship which soon developed into what Auden regarded as a "marriage."[37] This relationship gave Auden much happiness, but Kallman broke off the romantic part of the involvement in January of 1941, leaving Auden devastated.[38] The two remained friends until Auden's

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[34]Carpenter, Auden, 243-45.

[35]Carpenter, Auden, 268.

[36]Carpenter, Auden, 257; Osborne, 190-91.

[37]Carpenter, Auden, 257-63

[38]Carpenter, Auden, 311-17.

death, however.[39] Kallman, an opera lover, exposed Auden to this genre, which Auden subsequently came to love also.[40] The two men later were to collaborate on several opera libretti, including a translation of Mozart's Magic Flute[41] and the libretto for Stravinsky's opera, The Rake's Progress.[42]

Auden failed to return to England when World War II broke out in September. When it became apparent that he planned on settling in America for good, he began to be attacked in the British press for deserting his country in its time of need.[43] In the late spring or early summer of 1940, Auden went to the British Embassy for advice. There he was told that "only technically qualified people" were wanted to return to England.[44] In 1940, Auden applied for American citizenship and registered for the draft.[45] He was turned down by the draft board in 1942, much to his disappointment, because of his

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[39]Osborne, 191.

[40]Carpenter, Auden, 261-62; Osborne, 193.

[41]Carpenter, Auden, 379, 398.

[42]Carpenter, Auden, 349-57; Osborne, 225-28.

[43]Carpenter, Auden, 290-92; Osborne, 186-88.

[44]Carpenter, Auden, 292.

[45]Osborne, 200.

Auden served as a civilian research chief with the Morale Division of the US Strategic Bombing Survey. In that capacity, he traveled to Germany "to study the psychological effects of bombing on the civilian population in Germany." While he was there, he saw not only the burned-out cities but also the Nazi death camps. "The work is very interesting but I'm crying sometimes," he wrote. He was not sure which was worse, the Germans' murder of the Jews or the Allied bombers' destruction of the German buildings and populace.[47] Auden told a friend: "I cannot help but ask myself, 'Was there no other way?'"[48]

Auden felt profoundly disillusioned at the cruelty of humankind as evinced by World War II. He gained great solace, however, in a renewed dedication to the Christian religion which he had abandoned while he was still in boarding school.[49] Auden's new faith helped him to believe that events which seemed horrible at the time had an underlying good purpose which the church could help to interpret.[50]

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[47]Osborne, 217-20.

[48]Carpenter, Auden, 334.

[49]Carpenter, Auden, 27, 282-87, 297-302; Osborne, 202-5.

[50]Carpenter, Auden, 284.

In the summer of 1941, Auden's mother died. Auden took the news very hard. In a letter to a friend, he wrote,

> I was surprised at the violence of my feelings, though I had known it was likely. When mother dies, one is, for the first time, really alone in the world, and that is hard.[51]

A woman named Elizabeth Mayer seemed to take on the function of substitute mother figure for Auden now.[52] Mrs. Mayer was a lady who had given up a career as a concert pianist in order to raise a family. Mrs. Mayer had many artistic friends, including Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears, who lived for awhile in her house on Long Island.[53] Auden had many other female friends as well, including a wealthy woman named Caroline Newton, who for a few years became his patron.[54]

In the early 1940s, Auden taught at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and at Swarthmore College. Students found his teaching style eccentric but brilliant. He challenged students and, in so doing, opened up exciting new intellectual frontiers to them.[55] In 1956,

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[51]Carpenter, Auden, 313-14.

[52]Carpenter, Auden, 314.

[53]Carpenter, Auden, 275-76.

[54]Carpenter, Auden, 310-11, 321, 324-5, 332.

[55]Carpenter, Auden, 318-19, 324-27, 328-29.

Auden accepted a coveted part-time, honorary Professorship of Poetry at Oxford, although he retained residency in the United States. During his five years in this position he delivered "lively and aphoristic" lectures which were "usually attended by large and enthusiastic audiences."[56]

From 1945 on, Auden lived mainly from his writing and took no more full-time teaching jobs. He continued to sell his poems to magazines and to bring out collections of his poetry in the United States with Random House. He also did a considerable amount of editing and translating of other authors' works.[57] He collaborated with his friend Chester Kallman on the libretti for several operas. The most successful of these was The Rake's Progress, which is still widely performed today.[58] In his later years, Auden won many literary prizes.[59]

As Auden grew older, he became more eccentric than ever in his habits. He maintained the rigid schedule that he had practiced all his life of getting up early in the morning to write, but he now required a great deal of alcohol to do so. He became more doctrinaire than he had ever been. His conversations were now often long

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[56]Carpenter, Auden, 380-85.

[57]Carpenter, Auden, 337, 379, 398406, 429.

[58]Carpenter, Auden, 349-57, 370-71, 398-407.

[59]Carpenter, Auden, 422.

morning to write, but he now required a great deal of alcohol to do so. He became more doctrinaire than he had ever been. His conversations were now often longmonologues in which he repeated the same ideas or stories over and over.[60] His biographer Humphrey Carpenter, however, writes that:

> The obsessive punctuality, the inconsiderate habits, the frequent tedium of his monologues and well-worn anecdotes did not obscure the deeper level of kindness, even gentleness, which his old friends had known for so many years.[61]

By 1970, Auden was becoming unhappy with life in New York City. The neighborhood in which he lived had decayed and was no longer safe.[62] In 1972, Auden returned to his native England. He was given a house in which to live on the grounds of Oxford University. Auden's health was now failing.[63] He acknowledged this fact in poems such as this one, which also conveys a certain feeling of peace and acceptance of the fact:

> Now for oblivion: let
> the belly-mind take over . . .
> Should dreams haunt you, heed them not,
> for all, both sweet and horrid,

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[60]Carpenter, Auden, 385, 391-92, 401, 409, 411-12, 422, 424-25, 428, 432-34, 440-41, 445-46, 448.

[61]Carpenter, Auden, 434.

[62]Carpenter, Auden, 430-33.

[63]Carpenter, Auden, 441-48.

are jokes in dubious taste,
too jejune to have truck with.
Sleep, Big Baby, sleep your fill.[64]

In September 1973, Auden went with Chester Kallman for a weekend in Vienna. On the evening of Friday, September 28, Auden gave a poetry reading for the Austrian Society of Literature in the Josefplatz. The next morning, Kallman found him dead in his hotel room. The autopsy showed that Auden had died of a heart attack.[65]

Auden left everything to Chester Kallman in his will. Now that his friend was dead, Kallman felt as though his life had lost all purpose. He died the following January at the age of fifty-four.[66]

Britten's Life

Benjamin Britten was born in Lowestoft in Suffolk on November 22, 1913. His father was a dentist and his mother was an amateur singer. Benjamin was the youngest of four children. His siblings were Barbara, eleven years older, Bobby, six years older, and Beth four years older.[67]

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[64]W. H. Auden, "A Lullaby;" quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 449.

[65]Carpenter, Auden, 449-50.

[66]Carpenter, Auden, 453.

[67]Humphrey Carpenter, Benjamin Britten: A Biography (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1992), 6.

When Benjamin was three years old, he developed pneumonia, a disease from which he almost died. Although he survived, the illness precipitated a heart murmur.[68] Throughout his life, he was to have many illnesses, some of them possibly psychosomatic.[69]

Benjamin was a beautiful child, with blue eyes, golden curls, and pink cheeks. His sister Beth said that people called him "Dear" so much that he thought it was his name.[70]

Britten's family lived near a naval base which the German Zeppelins attacked repeatedly in 1916. The Britten family was often forced to seek refuge in the cellar.[71] Benjamin Britten told his biographer Imogen Holst (daughter of Gustav Holst) that the first sound he remembered hearing was an explosion during wartime.[72] "Throughout his life," wrote Holst, "he could remember the terror of that moment." Britten's sister Beth wrote that "after the war started, one day he was asleep in his baby

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[68]Carpenter, Britten, 5-6.

[69]Carpenter, Britten, 28-30, 115-16,307, 331-333, 368, 373, 389, 407, 415-16, 442, 449, 451, 485, 510, 538-540, 542, 543.

[70]Donald Mitchell, A Time There Was: A Profile of Benjamin Britten, directed by Tony Palmer, London Weekend Television, 1980, videocassette.

[71]Carpenter, Britten, 6.

[72]Imogen Holst, Benjamin Britten, 3rd ed., The Great Composers Series (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), 11.

carriage in the garden. He woke up crying, and when asked what was the matter he said, 'Bomb drop on Dear's head.'"[73]

When Benjamin was five years old, he began to write music, although his first efforts were "really not much more than dots and dashes on a bit of paper." The effect was more visual than aural.[74] When he was seven years old, Benjamin started to take piano lessons.[75] From that time on, he began to connect the notes more with the sound in his mind. He wrote songs and counterpoint and harmony exercises.[76]

Britten dedicated many of his early compositions to his mother.[77] Britten's mother, like Auden's, was a strong, sometimes domineering personality. She recognized her son's talent and was, according to a childhood friend of Britten's, "determined that he was going to be a great

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[73]Beth Britten, My Brother Benjamin (The Kensal Press, 1986), 31; quoted in Carpenter, Benjamin Britten, 6.

[74]Benjamin Britten, Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976, ed. Donald Mitchell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), vol. 1, 1923-1939, 100.

[75]Carpenter, Britten, 8.

[76]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 100.

[77]Mitchell, Introduction to Letters, by Britten, vol. 1, 63-64.

musician."[78] Britten's father, on the other hand, was not musical. Some members and friends of the family described him as a "hard" man. The father was skeptical of Benjamin's ability to support himself with his music but took pride in his son's musical achievements.[79]

When Britten was twelve, he began composition lessons with Frank Bridge. Britten was Bridge's only pupil, and Bridge, who had no children of his own, treated Benjamin like an adopted son.[80] Bridge was very strict with Britten.[81] In a BBC interview, Britten recalled:

> . . . he taught me an enormous amount . . . and gave me a broader horizon generally. I'm most grateful for him having taught me [to] take infinite trouble over getting every note quite right. He used to perform the most terrible operations on the music I would rather confidently show him. He would play every passage slowly on the piano and say, "Now listen to this - is this what you meant?" And of course I would start by defending it, but then one would realize as . . . he went on playing this passage over and over again - that one hadn't really thought enough about it. And he really taught me to take as much trouble as I possibly could over every passage, over every progression, over every line and I'm most grateful to him for that . . .[82]

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[78]Dr. Basil Reeve, in interview with Donald Mitchell, Letters, vol. 1, 12..

[79]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 10-11.

[80]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 100.

[81]Carpenter, Britten, 16-17.

[82]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 101.

Britten recalled that Bridge taught him two very important lessons:

> One was that you should try to find yourself and be true to what you found. The other - obviously connected with it - was his scrupulous attention to good technique, the business of saying clearly what was in one's mind.[83]

When Britten was eight he was sent to South Lodge Preparatory School. The headmaster there was Thomas Sewell, who had a reputation for being somewhat of a sadist. A schoolmate of Britten recalls,

> You got beaten on the slightest pretext, with a hell of a palaver. For really extra special beatings the whole school was assembled, and the criminal was brought out before them, and then was led away to a dormitory above the school room. We always said that Sewell liked beating boys, but we were much too frightened to complain.[84]

Britten himself told an interviewer that this early exposure to cruelty might have been the roots from which his pacifism sprang:

> I can remember the first time - I think it was the very first day that I was in school - that I heard a boy being beaten, and I can remember my absolute astonishment that people didn't immediately rush to help him. And to find that it was sort of condoned and accepted was something that shocked me very

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[83]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 101.

[84]Carpenter, Britten, 10.

much. Whether or not it all grew from that I don't know.[85]

Britten also had compassion for animals. At his preparatory school, South Lodge, in Lowestoft, he wrote an essay on animals which turned into a condemnation of hunting and war, both of which he viewed as forms of organized cruelty.[86] Britten was to explore the link between hunting and war again in the song cycle, Our Hunting Fathers.

After South Lodge, Britten went to Gresham's School in Norfolk, the same school Auden had attended earlier.[87] Eric Crozier, a friend and collaborator of Britten's, said that Britten told him later in life that he had been raped by a teacher at school (Crozier did not specify which of the two schools he meant). No one else has publicly confirmed this statement.[88]

After Gresham's, Britten was awarded a scholarship to the Royal College of Music. His composition teacher there was John Ireland. Ireland was an irresponsible and unstable man. On at least one occasion, Ireland made

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[85]Carpenter, Britten, 10.

[86]Imogen Holst, Britten, 20.

[87]Carpenter, Britten, 20.

[88]For a thorough discussion of this controversial point, see Carpenter, Britten, 19-25.

sexual advances to Britten, which disgusted his pupil. In addition, Ireland may have been envious of Britten's relationship with Bridge, who was a more important musical influence on him than Ireland was.[89]

Although Britten liked his piano teacher, Arthur Benjamin, he was unhappy with the RCM in general, believing it to be an amateurish establishment. Many of the faculty, said Britten, were "inclined to suspect technical brilliance of being superficial and insincere." This, he said, was a holdover from the days of the director Sir Hubert Parry (Parry had been the school's director from 1894 until 1918). Parry had "stressed the amateur idea" and had admired "the English Gentleman (who generally thinks it rather vulgar to take too much trouble)."[90]

In January 1937, Britten's mother died. Britten plunged into a deep depression which he tried to stave off with overwork.[91] Britten had been extremely close to his mother. When he had been at Gresham's, he had missed his mother terribly. In his diaries, he wrote of his terrible anxieties when he did not hear from her. One diary entry written after a return from a vacation reads, "Quite a

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[89]Carpenter, Britten, 37-40, 50.

[90]Carpenter, Britten, 35.

[91]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 15.

successful day considering it is the first away from my darling."[92] Donald Mitchell commented that "there was not, I think, to be another 'my darling' in Britten's life until Pears came into it.'"[93]

Peter Pears was a young tenor in the BBC Singers.[94] Britten and Pears began as friends but they consummated their relationship in the United States, where they had gone in the hope of getting more musical opportunities. The two became lifelong companions and collaborators. Pears tended to play the dominant role in their relationship and Britten was very attached to Pears, perhaps in a similar manner to how he had been attached to his own mother.[95] Britten admired Pears's voice, which, according to some people, sounded very much like Britten's mother's voice.[96] When Britten was young and had insomnia, Mrs. Britten used to sing him to sleep. Britten perhaps as a consequence was much taken with the beauty of the human voice, saying that "I think that the acme of perfection in the art - in music art - is the human voice

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[92]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 8-9.

[93]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 9.

[94]Carpenter, Britten, 100-1.

[95]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 20-21.

[96]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 14.

singing beautifully."[97] He loved Peter's voice very much, referring to it as the "golden box."[98] Many surviving letters attest to Britten's and Pears's devotion to each other, such as the one from April 1966 in which Britten wrote, "what you think or feel is really the most important thing in my life. It is an unbelievable thing to be spending my life with you. I can't think what the Gods were doing to allow it to happen!"[99] Pears's and Britten's relationship was musical as well as emotional. The two became regular recital partners. In these recitals, Britten supported Pears at the piano beautifully. Pears spoke of "an extraordinary connection between [Britten's] brain and his heart and the tips of his fingers." Pears said, "It was amazing what colors he could get. He thought a color and he could do it."[100] Britten's biographer Donald Mitchell called him "one of the greatest accompanists of the century."[101]

In turn, Pears's artistry inspired Britten to create numerous masterpieces for the human voice, ranging

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[97]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 9.

[98]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 21.

[99]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 21.

[100]Carpenter, Britten, 112.

[101]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 21-22.

from the Michelangelo Sonnets of 1942[102] to Death in Venice of 1973[103] in which Pears sang the leading role of Gustav Aschenbach. Lord Harewood, a friend of Britten and Pears, described the way in which Pears inspired Britten's compositions. "Ben wanted, and found, imagination and sensitivity in Peter's singing and approach, and from this he conjured what he wanted for his music."[104]

The reaction to Britten's music during his early years of composing was mixed.[105] In the early part of the century, there were two main schools of English composition: the English pastoral composers with their relatively simple, folksong-based melodies and harmonies, and the Parry-Stanford School whose music imitated that of Brahms.[106] Britten's music could not fit well into either of these categories. Many of the influences on Britten's music were not from England but from the European continent: Bartok, Stravinsky, Shostakovich, and

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[102]Carpenter, Britten, 158-59, 173, 177, 566.

[103]Carpenter, Britten, 513, 518, 532, 535, 537, 541, 544-45, 549, 550, 555, 556, 564, 566.

[104]Carpenter, Britten, 112-13.

[105]Carpenter, Britten, 47-49, 59-60, 76, 89, 148, 160.

[106]Michael Kennedy, Britten, The Master Musicians Series (London: J. M. Dent, 1981), 9-10; Carpenter, Britten, 35, 39, 42.

Mahler.[107] Partly because of a perceived difficulty with getting his works performed in England, partly because of the threat of war, and partly because his friend W. H. Auden had gone there also, Britten left for America in 1939 in the company of Peter Pears.[108]

Later in 1939, England declared war on Germany. The English government advised Britten to stay in America, which he did for awhile. Eventually, however, his homesickness and his concern for relatives and friends in England became too much for him; he and Pears returned home in 1942.[109]

When Pears and Britten returned to England they registered for Conscientious Objector status. They were required to appear before a tribunal who would judge whether or not they were genuine pacifists. The verdict was favorable, and the two were allowed to go on with their musical work.[110]

In 1945, Britten scored a tremendous triumph with his opera Peter Grimes. Britten was elated. He realized

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[107]Carpenter, Britten, 62; Donald Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?", in The Britten Companion, ed. Christopher Palmer (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), 25-38.

[108]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 30-33; Carpenter, Britten, 124-31.

[109]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 33-41.

[110]Carpenter, Britten, 174-77.

how important the event was, not only for himself, but for the future of English opera:

> I must confess that I am very pleased with the way that [the opera] seems to "come over the footlights," & also with the way the audience takes it, & what is perhaps more, returns night after night to take it again! . . . Perhaps it is an omen for English Opera in the future.[111]

The leading character was a fisherman whose apprentices met suspicious, violent deaths. Grimes was drawn with considerable depth as an outsider, misunderstood by society.[112] Britten said that this character was partly based on his and Pears's position as pacifists:

> A central feeling for us was that of the individual against the crowd, with ironic overtones for our own situation. As conscientious objectors we were out of it. We couldn't say we suffered physically, but naturally we experienced tremendous tension. I think it was partly this feeling which led us to make Grimes a character of vision and conflict, the tortured idealist he is, rather than the villain he was in Crabbe.[113]

Britten's pacifism was evident in many of his works besides Peter Grimes. Early in his career, Britten wrote music for the film, Peace of Britain, and also a Pacifist

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[111]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 53.

[112]Carpenter, Britten, 155-57, 203.

[113]Murray Schafer, British Composers in Interview (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 116-17; quoted in Carpenter, Britten, 203.

March.[114] Ballad of Heroes[115] and Sinfonia da Requiem[116] also had pacifist messages. Among Britten's later works, the opera Owen Wingrave, written around the time of the Vietnam War, was about a young man from a military family who refused to fight for moral reasons.[117] In the Cantata Misericordium, written for the Red Cross, the Good Samaritan teaches the moral that all men are brothers and deserve each other's compassion.[118] The War Requiem was perhaps Britten's most famous pacifist work. It included poems by Wilfred Owen, a young British poet tragically killed in World War I. These poems depicted the horror of war for all nations involved. Britten chose singers of three different nationalities: English (Peter Pears), German (Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau), and Russian (Galina Vishnevskaya), to perform the solo parts in his work.[119] Near the end of the oratorio, two soldiers from opposing sides meet in a long, dark, tunnel. It becomes apparent that they are

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[114]Donald Mitchell, Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936 (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1981), 62-70.

[115]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 141-44.

[116]Carpenter, Britten, 140, 146-47; Kennedy, 152-53.

[117]Carpenter, Britten, 506-11; Kennedy, 249-53.

[118]Carpenter, Britten, 418-20; Kennedy, 228-29.

[119]Carpenter, Britten, 402-10.

both dead and that national affiliations are now meaningless. The one soldier tells the other, "I am the enemy you killed, my friend."[120]

Britten was especially concerned with the welfare of those who were powerless to help themselves, including children and animals. This may have stemmed from his experiences of cruelty at school.. The works Children's Crusade,[121] The Little Sweep,[122] and Who Are These Children?[123] are three notable examples of his concern for children. Britten spoke out against hunting in the works Our Hunting Fathers, Tit for Tat (early songs to the poetry of Walter de la Mare which Britten wrote while he was in school)[124] and a setting of William Henry Davies's poem "Sport," which Britten wrote in 1931.[125]

With the success of Peters Grimes, Britten realized that opera was a medium to which he was especially well

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[120]Benjamin Britten, War Requiem, words from the Missa pro Defunctis and the poems of Wilfred Owen, vocal score by Imogen Holst (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1962), 157-67.

[121]Kennedy, 230; Carpenter, 486.

[122]Carpenter, Britten, 274-75.

[123]Carpenter, Britten, 495-96.

[124]Benjamin Britten, Tit for Tat: Five Settings from Boyhood of Poems by Walter de la Mare (London: Faber Music, 1969).

[125]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 155.

suited and with which he felt a great affinity.[126] In 1946, Britten helped found the English Opera Group to encourage the growth of native English opera.[127] Over the years Britten composed several first-rate operas which still remain in the repertoire such as Albert Herring, Billy Budd, Midsummer Night's Dream, and Death in Venice.

Britten also became a great conductor, with a technique which was efficient yet very musical. Britten eschewed the theatrics of many modern-day conductors.[128] Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau wrote that Britten "was too much of an original to seem like an actor, as is true for most of the lions of the podium. No one ever caught him playing a role."[129] Janet Baker said that

> one was upheld by his marvelous shaping of the phrase but at the same time given room, a sort of freedom, to yield to the inspiration of the moment. Only the very greatest conductors have this ability.[130]

In 1947, many music festivals were being established in England, including the Edinburgh Festival

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[126]Carpenter, Britten, 193.

[127]Carpenter, Britten, 243, 248.

[128]Carpenter, Britten, 248-49.

[129]Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Echoes of a Lifetime (New York: Macmillan, 1989), 273; quoted in Carpenter, Britten, 250.

[130]Carpenter, Britten, 250.

under Rudolf Bing. Inspired by these examples, Britten and Pears founded the annual summer festival of music at Aldeburgh, where Britten had purchased a sea-front house in 1947. The Aldeburgh Festival gave Britten the artistic independence he had longed for. Britten's works were performed along with the works of other composers chosen by the festival committee. Britten and Pears contributed to the festival by performing without fees.[131] The Crag House in Aldeburgh, where Britten and Pears lived, overlooking the sea, provided an ideal environment for Britten's composing.[132] Britten was able to bring excellent artists to the Aldeburgh Festival. The Festival still exists and is conjoined with the Britten-Pears School for Advanced Vocal Studies.[133]

In 1963, Britten turned fifty. By now he and his music had become widely accepted in England. There were many radio and television tributes,[134] and Anthony Gishford of Boosey & Hawkes prepared a Festschrift entitled Tribute to Benjamin Britten on His Fiftieth

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[131]Carpenter, Britten, 252-61; Mitchell, A Time There Was.

[132]Mitchell, A Time There Was.

[133]Mitchell, A Time There Was.

[134]Carpenter, Britten, 418.

Birthday.[135] Britten himself conducted a special concert of his works at Albert Hall.[136] Donald Mitchell wrote in the Daily Telegraph that the huge ovation which Britten received on this occasion "must have convinced him that his music forms a living and cherished part of the experience of a very wide public."[137] At the same time, Britten did not feel totally satisfied with what he had achieved. "I am enormously aware that I haven't yet come up to the technical standards Bridge set me," he said in an article in the Sunday Telegraph.[138]

In June, 1967, a new, bigger opera house and concert hall was opened for the Aldeburgh Festival. This facility was housed in a converted brewery called the Maltings. Queen Elizabeth, a dedicated supporter of Britten's, came in person for the opening of the hall.[139] In 1969, the Festival experienced a great tragedy when the Maltings burnt down. Due to Britten's great courage and determination as well as the generous contributions of

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[135]Anthony Gishford, ed., Tribute to Benjamin Britten on His Fiftieth Birthday (London: Faber and Faber, 1963).

[136]Carpenter, Britten, 418.

[137]Carpenter, Britten, 418.

[138]Carpenter, Britten, 418.

[139]Mitchell, A Time There Was.

many music lovers, the Maltings miraculously was rebuilt in time for the 1970 season.[140]

A medical check-up in 1972 revealed that Britten's heart, which had never been strong, was now deteriorating. The doctor recommended surgery, but Britten insisted on postponing the surgery until he completed his opera, Death in Venice, which he thought would be his last major composition and Pears's last major operatic role. His friends were impressed with his great courage and fortitude in this situation.[141] The opera was a triumph for both Britten and Pears. In it, Britten explored a theme which had concerned him throughout his life: the tension between reason and passion.[142]

Britten finally submitted to a heart operation in April 1973. During the operation, in which the doctor replaced a heart valve, some debris from the old valve broke loose, lodged in the brain and caused a mild stroke.[143] Because of this stroke Britten was unable to use his right hand as in the past. It was now very difficult for him to write out music and to play the

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[140]Carpenter, Britten, 488-92, 496-97.

[141]Carpenter, Britten, 540-41.

[142]Carpenter, Britten, 549-56.

[143]Carpenter, Britten, 545-47.

piano. His inability to play the piano as he once had was devastating to him.[144]

Britten continued to compose, however. He produced several fine works in the time between the operation and his death.[145] In these years, he was cared for by a remarkable nurse named Rita Thompson with whom he became very close.[146] By the fall of 1974, Britten accepted the fact that his health was not going to improve.[147]

In 1976, Britten was made a lord, becoming the first English composer ever to receive that honor.[148] He continued to compose until the last three or four weeks of his life.[149]

Not long before Britten died, Pears wrote a note to a friend, saying,

> Ben is slowly fading - decrescendo e morendo. But he is calm and clear and ready to go - each day a little weaker. So considerate and a wonderful patient, and our Rita has looked after him like an angel. A wonderful end.[150]

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[144]Carpenter, Britten, 558-61.

[145]Carpenter, Britten, 562, 565, 569-73.

[146]Donald Mitchell, A Time There Was; Carpenter, Britten, 546-49, 559-60, 566-67.

[147]Carpenter, Britten, 564.

[148]Carpenter, Britten, 576-77.

[149]Rita Thompson in interview with Donald Mitchell, A Time There Was.

[150]Carpenter, Britten, 581.

Britten died at home on the evening of Friday, December 3rd, in Peter Pears's arms.

Upon hearing of Britten's death, the Queen sent a telegram of condolence to Peter Pears. Britten's funeral was held in Aldeburgh, where he was also buried. The Aldeburgh Festival Singers performed Britten's Hymn to the Virgin, and the congregation sang hymns from his cantata, Saint Nicholas. Pears left Aldeburgh that afternoon to travel to Cardiff, where he had been engaged to sing Saint Nicholas the following day.[151]

After Britten's death, Pears continued to perform Britten's music all over the world. In 1980, Pears retired from performing, but continued to teach until his own death in 1986.

After Pears died, his and Britten's estates were combined to create the Britten-Pears Foundation. This organization helps to support the Aldeburgh Festival, the Britten-Pears School, the Britten-Pears Library, and the Archive, which contains almost all of Britten's juvenilia and manuscripts. The foundation also helps to sponsor the recording of unknown and neglected works of Britten's and gives out awards to deserving young composers. This organization, in accordance with the wishes of Britten and

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[151]Carpenter, Britten, 582-83.

Pears, encourages "civilized attitudes to homosexuality" and takes a stand for "peace and nonviolence."[152]

The Association of Britten and Auden

In June, 1935, Auden was hired by the General Post Office Film Unit to write narration for two documentary films, Night Mail and Coal Face.[153] Since the budget for music for the films was limited, the producers hired the unknown twenty-two-year-old composer Benjamin Britten, who had just graduated from the Royal College of Music.[154] Britten and Auden met on July 5, 1935 at the Downs School where Auden was teaching. Britten wrote about the event in his diary:

> Basil Wright [from the GPO Film Unit] calls for me in his car at 10:00 & takes me down to Colwall near Malvern. . . We come here to talk over matters for films with Wystan Auden . . . Auden is the most amazing man, a very brilliant & attractive personality.[155]

In a letter to his friend Marjorie Fass in October, 1935, Britten wrote of Auden,

> He is a very startling personality but absolutely sincere and very brilliant. He has a very wide

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[152]Carpenter, Britten, 586.

[153]Carpenter, Auden, 177-78.

[154]Carpenter, Auden, 178.

[155]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 380.

> knowledge, not only of course of literature, but of every branch of art, and especially of politics; this last in the direction that I can't help feeling every serious person, and artists especially, must have.[156]

Auden and Britten became close friends. Auden broadened Britten's horizons by encouraging Britten to read poetry and become more aware of political events.[157] Auden also influenced Britten in some of his choices of texts to set to music. For example, Britten said that "Auden got us [Britten and Pears] to take Donne seriously."[158] Britten composed the song cycle The Holy Sonnets of John Donne for Peter Pears in 1945.[159] Auden introduced Britten to the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud,[160] whose words Britten set in the orchestral song cycle Les Illuminations of 1939.[161] In a 1960 BBC interview, Britten acknowledged Auden's effect on his taste in poetry:

> . . . the person, I think, who developed my love [of poetry] was the poet, Auden . . . We collaborated over music and verse for a film, and he had an enormous influence on me for quite a

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[156]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 378.

[157]Carpenter, Auden, 187.

[158]Carpenter, Britten, 227.

[159]Carpenter, Britten, 227.

[160]Carpenter, Britten, 126.

[161]Carpenter, Britten, 137.

> considerable period. He showed me many things. I remember, for instance, he it was who introduced me to the works of Rimbaud, who was only a name to me then; and he showed me the different periods in verse. I remember he showed me Chaucer for the first time. I'd always imagined that was a kind of foreign language, but as he read it, which was very well, I understood almost immediately what it meant, and I find now that it isn't so difficult to read - one must just have confidence and read ahead and then the meaning comes very strongly, very easily.[162]

Although Britten was fascinated by Auden's intellectual capabilities, he apparently found Auden's "startling personality" and doctrinaire statements intimidating. In a diary entry for the beginning of 1936, Britten wrote that he had "a bad inferiority complex in company of brains like . . . W. H. Auden."[163]

Auden, who often interfered in his friends' affairs in a bossy and dictatorial manner,[164] took it upon himself to help Britten "come out" sexually. He urged Britten, whom he saw as cold and distant in sexual matters, to open himself up to sexual experiences with other men. The language Auden used with Britten in this regard was quite crude and blunt, and often shocked Britten, who was much more conservative and milder in

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[162]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 384

[163]Carpenter, Auden, 73.

[164]Carpenter, Auden, 54, 62-63, 67, 75-78, 319-20.

manner.[165] Auden's friend, the writer Christopher Isherwood, also spoke to Britten along these lines. Isherwood told Humphrey Carpenter,

> We were extraordinarily interfering in this respect - as bossy as a pair of self-assured young psychiatrists - he [Auden] wasn't a doctor's son and I wasn't an ex-medical student for nothing![166]

At the end of their travel book Letters from Iceland, Auden and Louis MacNeice wrote a mock "Last Will and Testament." In this mock will, Auden wrote the lines:

> To my friend Benjamin Britten, composer, I beg
> That fortune send him soon a passionate affair.[167]

In March, 1936, Auden wrote and dedicated a poem to Britten. The narrator of this poem, "Underneath the abject willow," advises the reader to embrace the physical and emotional experience of love:

> Underneath the abject willow,
> Lover, sulk no more;
> Act from thought should quickly follow:
> What is thinking for?
>
> Your unique and moping station
> Proves you cold;
> Stand up and fold
> Your map of desolation.

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[165]Carpenter, Auden, 187; Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 379-81.

[166]Carpenter, Auden, 188.

[167]W. H. Auden and Louis MacNeice, Letters from Iceland (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), 238.

Bells that toll across the meadows
From the somber spire,
Toll for those unloving shadows
Love does not require.
All that lives may love; why longer
Bow to loss
With arms across?
Strike and you shall conquer.

Geese in flocks above you flying
Their direction know;
Brooks beneath the thin ice flowing
To their oceans go;
Coldest love will warm to action,
Walk then, come,
No longer numb,
Into your satisfaction.[168]

In 1936, Auden dedicated another poem to Britten called "Night covers up the rigid land," which he had written before the two men had met. This poem is from an unsuccessful suitor to the object of his love. It has not been substantiated, however, whether or not Auden actually tried to make love to Britten.[169] Neither Peter Pears nor Christopher Isherwood, however, believe that Auden and Britten ever slept together.[170]

For his part, Auden was very impressed with Britten's compositional talent, especially his setting of the English language to music. He thought of Britten as a

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[168]Auden, The English Auden, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 160; quoted in Carpenter, Benjamin Britten, 78.

[169]Carpenter, Auden, 188; Mitchell, Letters, vol. 1, 382-84.

[170]Mitchell, Letters, vol. 1, 382.

member of his artistic group, "The Gang," and introduced Britten to his friends as "the composer."[171] In one of his poems, Auden referred to Britten as "Ben who writes tunes in his sleep."[172] In later life, Auden wrote of Britten,

> What immediately struck me about Britten the composer, was his extraordinary musical sensitivity in relation to the English language. One had always been told that English was an impossible tongue to set or to sing. Since I already knew the songs of the Elizabethan composers like Dowland, I knew this to be false, but the influence of that very great composer, Handel, on the setting of English had been unfortunate. There was Sullivan's setting of Gilbert's light verse to be sure, but then this music seemed so boring. Here at last was a composer who could set the language without undue distortion.[173]

Donald Mitchell tells why he thinks Auden and Britten worked well together:

> . . . Britten and Auden were astonishingly well matched [as artistic collaborators]: each possessed a prodigious technical virtuosity which enabled him to turn his hand virtually to any form of verse or music. Whether it was popular song, parody, or the most elaborate and complex of inventions (whether the linguistic means were words or notes), both Britten and Auden, seemingly at the drop of a hat, could summon up the appropriate "voice." They were brilliant ventriloquists, both, a feature that distinguishes their early work (and we are not necessarily thinking of their joint works) and singles them out as exceptional creators

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[171]Carpenter, Britten, 70.

[172]Carpenter, Auden, 248.

[173]Carpenter, Auden, 324.

> in the history of twentieth-century English letters and music. It was a gift that gave rise to a mortifying suspicion in thirties England, in which the amateur tradition and disdain for "showing off" were prized virtues.[174]

Britten and Auden, as has been mentioned, first collaborated on the film Coal Face in 1935 at the General Post Office Film Unit.[175] There they also worked together on the films Night Mail (1936) and The Way to the Sea (1936).[176] The G. P. O. Film Unit made documentary films under the auspices of the Post Office but were allowed to cover a variety of subjects other than the postal service. The leaders of the Film Unit wanted to depict the everyday life of the working and middle classes in a realistic manner and thereby raise social consciousness on issues such as unemployment, poverty, and rearmament.[177] Auden wrote narration and even worked as an assistant director although he had no previous experience in films.[178] Britten's musical scores for the documentaries were highly imaginative and innovative in

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[174]Mitchell, note, Letters, 381.

[175]Carpenter, Auden, 178.

[176]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 83-86, 88-93; Carpenter, Britten, 72-73, 79, 90; Carpenter, Auden, 182-83, 205; Osborne, 138.

[177]Mitchell, Britten and Auden in the Thirties, 57-67.

[178]Carpenter, Auden, 177-88.

their orchestration.[179] Britten composed this music to order and under the constraint of time. His experience at the Film Unit was to stand him in good stead when he turned to the composition of opera, another dramatic form, in later life.[180]

Auden, impressed with Britten's work, asked him to write incidental music for two of his and Isherwood's plays, The Ascent of F6 (1937) and On the Frontier (1938), produced at the Group Theatre.[181] Britten and Auden also collaborated on the radio feature Hadrian's Wall for the BBC in 1937.[182] In addition, they put together a program for the BBC consisting of their selection of bad poetry and bad music called Up the Garden Path.[183]

In 1936, Britten set Auden's selection of poetry about animals to music in the symphonic song cycle, Our Hunting Fathers. In 1937, Britten composed On This Island, a song cycle to four poems of Auden from his volume of poetry published in England as Look, Stranger! and in America as On This Island. One song was a setting

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[179]Mitchell, Britten and Auden in the Thirties, 83-86.

[180]Donald Mitchell, Benjamin Britten: The Early Years, vol. 1, cassette ECN 201/1, BBC, 1984.

[181]Osborne, 138, 178-79; Carpenter, Auden, 216, 246; Carpenter, Britten, 90, 97-98, 105, 106, 122-23.

[182]Carpenter, Britten, 114, 249; Carpenter, Auden, 232; Osborne, 143.

[183]Carpenter, Auden, 222; Osborne, 143.

of a poem written by Auden for his play with Christopher Isherwood, The Dog beneath the Skin.[184] During the years 1937-39, Britten set four Cabaret Songs by Auden. These witty songs were sung by the cabaret singer Hedli Anderson and were not published until after Britten's death.[185] Lesser-known early songs on Auden's poetry by Britten include "Underneath the Abject Willow" (1936),[186] "Night Covers up the Rigid Land"[187] and "Fish in the Unruffled

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[184]Carpenter, Britten, 104-5; Carpenter, Auden, 204; Osborne, 143; Graham Johnson, "Voice and Piano," in Christopher Palmer, ed., The Britten Companion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 288-89; Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 26, 318, 383, 511; Whittall, The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 38, 43-44, 104; Mitchell, "On This Island," in Britten and Auden, 133-170; Mitchell, "The Musical Atmosphere," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary on His Works by a Group of Specialists, ed. Mitchell and Hans Keller (New York: Philosophical Library, 1953), 16-20; Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Britten: A Commentary on His Works, ed. Mitchell and Keller, 63-63; Kennedy, Britten, The Master Musicians Series (London: J. M. Dent, 1981), 25-26, 35, 141-42, 178, 220, 274, 306.

[185]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 95, 108-11, 117, 127-29, 136, 145, 156; Osborne 148-49; Carpenter, Auden, 222 ; Carpenter, Britten, 105, 115, 129-30; Kennedy 18, 145, 306; Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 317, 543-9; Benjamin Britten, Letters from a Life: The Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten 1913-1976, ed. Donald Mitchell (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), vol. 2, 1913-1945, 657-9, 1337.

[186]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 17, 18, 65, 317, 382; Britten, Letters, vol. 2, 783-4; Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 140, 158, 163-64; Carpenter, Britten, 78-79.

[187]Britten, Letters, 383-84, 511.

Lakes" (1938).[188] Britten's Ballad of Heroes (1937), which Britten wrote to honor the men of the British Battalion of the International Brigade who had been killed in the Spanish Civil War, includes a setting of the poem "It's farewell to drawing-room's civilized cry" which Auden wrote before leaving to go to Spain for the Civil War.[189]

Britten was disturbed by Auden's decision to go to Spain to drive an ambulance in the Civil War. There was a real possibility that Auden would not return. Britten wrote to his friend John Pounder,

> I have seen a tremendous amount of Wystan Auden recently. He stayed with me in town for a week or so and was down here for a time too. He is a grand person, and I am terribly sad about his decision to go to Spain to fight. I agree that is fine and very brave of him - but what the Government wants is not martyrs - she's got enough of them, but arms and money; and Wystan can do more good back here than out there. Still one has enough respect for his integrity than to try and persuade him not to go. But it doesn't make it any the less annoying. It is also sickening as I have lots of work planned with him - I'm doing music for his new play F6; discussing an opera and also talking about a review for a Cambridge theatre with him.[190]

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[188]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 383

[189]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 142-44; Mitchell, notes, Letters, vol. 1, 461, 612.

[190]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 464-65.

On January 8th, 1937, Britten wrote in his diary,

> [Wystan] goes off to Spain (to drive an ambulance) tomorrow. It is terribly sad and I feel ghastly about it, tho' I feel it is perhaps the logical thing for him to do - being such a direct person. Anyhow it's phenomenally brave. Spend a glorious morning with him (at Lyons Corner House, coffee-drinking). Talk over everything, and he gives me two grand poems - a lullaby, and a big, simple, folky Farewell - that is overwhelmingly tragic and moving. I've Lots to do with them.[191]

The "lullaby" was Auden's poem "Lay your sleeping head, my love" which Britten never set to music. The "Farewell" of which he speaks was Auden's poem "It's farewell to the drawing room's civilized cry" which Britten used in Ballad of Heroes. At his meeting with Auden on January 8th, Britten was carrying with him the published miniature score of his piece for chamber orchestra Sinfonietta (1932) and the published vocal score of Our Hunting Fathers. Auden wrote out the text of "It's farewell to the drawing room's civilized cry" on the flyleaf of the Sinfonietta and "Lay your sleeping head, my love" in Britten's copy of Our Hunting Fathers.[192]

In 1939, after he had returned from his trips to Spain and China, Auden decided to emigrate to the United States. Britten and Peter Pears soon followed suit,

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[191]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 461.

[192]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 461-62.

partially because of Auden's example.[193] In America, Auden and Britten collaborated on a radio play called Dark Valley[194] and the operetta Paul Bunyan. Although audiences enjoyed the operetta, it was not well received by the critics, one of whom wrote that it was "as bewildering and irritating a treatment of the outsize lumberman as any two Englishmen could have devised."[195] Britten was very much discouraged by the failure of Paul Bunyan and refused to consent to a revival of the operetta until 1976.[196]

For a few months during the fall and winter of 1940-41, Britten and Pears lived with Auden in a house at 7 Middagh Street in Brooklyn Heights. This house was owned by the writer George Davis, who collaborated with Gypsy Rose Lee on her book, The G-String Murders. Other inhabitants of the house included Chester Kallman, the novelist Carson McCullers, Thomas Mann's son Golo Mann, the composer and writer Paul Bowles and his wife, the writer Jane Bowles. Auden presided over the house like a schoolmaster, collecting the rent punctiliously when it

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[193]Carpenter, Auden, 275.

[194]Carpenter, Auden, 295; Britten, Letters, vol. 2, 628, 824-25.

[195]E. W. White, Benjamin Britten, 3rd ed. (London: Boosey & Hawkes, 1970), 98; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 310.

[196]Carpenter, Auden, 310.

was due and chasing lingering party guests out of the sitting-room at one a.m.[197] Auden, who sat at the head of the table, insisted that meals begin exactly on time. Paul Bowles remembered that Auden would announce at the beginning of a meal that "we've got a roast and two veg, salad and savoury, and there will be no political discussion."[198] One visitor to the house remembered "George naked at the piano with a cigarette in his mouth, Carson on the ground with half a gallon of sherry, and then Wystan bursting in like a headmaster, announcing: 'Now then, dinner!'"[199] Another visitor recalled "a gay (in both senses of the word) occasion at which Auden and Gypsy Rose Lee were present. (Gypsy did not strip, but Auden did plenty of teasing)."[200] Louis MacNeice, who also stayed at the house for a few months, remembers trying to write poetry with Britten and Pears rehearsing on one side of his room and Gypsy Rose Lee talking excitedly on the other, "like a whirlwind of laughter and sex."[201]

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[197]Carpenter, Auden, 303-6.

[198]Carpenter, Auden, 304.

[199]Carpenter, Auden, 304.

[200]Osborne, 197.

[201]Osborne, 199.

The bohemianism of the household ran counter to Britten's character, and he never felt totally comfortablethere. [202] Peter Pears later described the atmosphere as "sordid beyond belief."[203]

In the spring, Britten and Pears left New York for a cross-country tour of the USA.[204] By June, Britten, who was now staying in California, admitted to being homesick. Carpenter believes that the physical distance between the two men gave Britten a chance to reassert his independence from the domineering Auden, who believed that the United States was superior to England and who wanted to stay in America.[205] On March 16, 1942, Britten and Pears returned to England.[206]

Shortly before Britten left the U. S. A., Auden wrote him a letter which reveals much about their relationship and about Auden's personality:

> I have been thinking a great deal about you and your work during the past year. As you know I think you are the white hope of music; for this very reason I am more critical of you than of anybody else, and I think I know something about the dangers that beset you as a man and as an artist because they are my own.

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[202]Osborne, 199.

[203]Carpenter, Auden, 304.

[204]Carpenter, Britten, 152.

[205]Carpenter, Britten, 154.

[206]Carpenter, Britten, 165.

> Goodness and Beauty are the results of a perfect balance between Order and Chaos, Bohemianism and Bourgeois Convention. Bohemian chaos alone ends in a mad jumble of beautiful scraps; Bourgeois convention alone ends in large unfeeling corpses.
>
> Every artist except the supreme masters has a bias one way or the other. The best pair of opposites I can think of in music are Wagner and Strauss. (Technical skill always comes from the bourgeois side of one's nature).
>
> For middle-class Englishmen like you and me, the danger is of course the second. Your attraction to thin-as-a-board-juveniles, i.e. to the sexless and innocent, is a symptom of this. And I am certain too that it is your denial and evasion of the demands of disorder that is responsible for your attacks of ill-health, i.e. sickness is your substitute for the Bohemian. Wherever you go you are and probably always will be surrounded by people who adore you, nurse you, and praise everything you do, e.g., Elisabeth, Peter (Please show this to P. to whom all this is also addressed). Up to a certain point this is fine for you, but beware. You see, Bengy dear, you are always tempted to make things too easy for yourself in this way, i.e. to build yourself a warm nest of love (of course when you get it, you find it a little stifling) by playing the lovable talented little boy.
>
> If you are really to develop to your full stature, you will have, I think, to suffer, and make others suffer, in ways which are totally strange to you at present, and against every conscious value that you have; i.e. you will have to be able to say what you never yet had the right to say - God, I'm a shit.[207]

On the boat back to England, Britten wrote the music for a choral work, Hymn to St. Cecilia, with text by Auden.[208] In the summer of 1942, Auden sent a text to

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[207]Britten, Letters, vol. 2, 1015-16.

[208]Osborne, 210; Carpenter, Auden, 297; Carpenter, Britten, 166-68.

Britten entitled For the Time Being, a Christmas oratorio. Britten, who believed that it was necessary for thecomposer to have some say in the writing of a libretto,[209] was "desperate at how far Wystan had gone without him," recalled Pears.[210] Britten told Auden that the text was much too long to set to music. Auden refused to cut it, so the project was dropped.[211] In the spring of 1943, Britten set "A Shepherd's Carol" to music for the BBC. This text was from an early draft of Auden's For the Time Being.[211] The only other text of Auden's that Britten was to set was the moving poem "Out on the Lawn I Lie in Bed" which describes Auden's experience of Agape in 1933 at the Downs School.[212] Britten used this text in a movement of his Spring Symphony.[213]

Charles Osborne writes that, starting with the disagreement between Britten and Auden over For the Time Being, their friendship began to cool. "They seem not to have quarrelled but rather to have drifted apart," writes Osborne, adding that one reason for this was the fact that Auden was still in America while Britten had returned to

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[209]Carpenter, Britten, 241.

[210]Carpenter, Auden, 333.

[211]Osborne, 215-16.

[212]Carpenter, Auden, 161-62; Osborne, 210.

[213]Kennedy, 190-92.

England. He also mentions that "Britten still thought Auden a stimulating and exciting companion, but found him more and more overbearing where artistic collaboration was concerned."[214]

On subsequent visits to England, Auden visited Britten several times, but Britten was less than friendly with him.[215] Auden's friend Stephen Spender says that after seeing one of Britten's operas, Auden sent Britten a letter critiquing the piece. Britten, according to Spender, sent the letter, torn into pieces, back to Auden.[216] The last time the two men met was at Aldeburgh in 1953.[217] On this occasion, Auden complained, "I was never allowed to see Ben alone - I feared as much; still, I was a bit sad."[218] Nevertheless, Auden donated a manuscript poetry book to be sold at an auction to raise money for Britten's Aldeburgh Festival.[219] In later life, Auden said,

> If I am loyal to my friends it is only because nobody I know has been as lucky as I have in the friends he has made. Only from one (he is famous

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[214]Osborne, 209-10.

[215]Carpenter, Auden, 375.

[216]Carpenter, Britten, 325.

[217]Carpenter, Britten, 325.

[218]Carpenter, Auden, 375.

[219]Carpenter, Auden, 375.

> and you can probably guess his name) have I been estranged, and that is a constant grief to me.[220]

Britten once told Charles Osborne that he regretted the rift with Auden.[221] Donald Mitchell was with Britten when he heard of Auden's death in 1973. Mitchell later told Humphrey Carpenter, "it was the only time I'd ever seen Ben weep."[222]

On February 1, 1976, Britten's and Auden's operetta Paul Bunyan was revived on BBC radio. It was the first complete performance of the work in thirty-three years.[223] Britten's friend and musical assistant Rosamund Strode believed that Britten now felt safe to resurrect the work after Auden's death, because he would not have to work with Auden and could make his own decisions about revisions.[224] Writing about the revival, New York Times critic Peter Porter praised the work. He called Auden the greatest librettist of the century and said that it was regrettable that Auden and Britten "were never to produce an extended masterpiece together."[225]

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[220]Carpenter, Auden, 375.

[221]Osborne, 209.

[222]Carpenter, Britten, 558.

[223]Carpenter, Britten, 573.

[224]Carpenter, Britten, 561.

[225]Carpenter, Britten, 574.

Donald Mitchell was present with Britten when he heard a tape of the BBC broadcast of Paul Bunyan. Mitchell told Humphrey Carpenter in an interview:

> Ben was profoundly moved by re-encountering this forgotten work from a forgotten - virtually suppressed - past. He hadn't remembered that it was such a "strong piece" - his words; and the impact of the music, combined with all the memories it aroused - of Auden, of the American years, of his own youth, energy and vitality - overwhelmed him. His own physical condition by now was pretty awful, and when we got to the end of the work, to the great Litany that precedes the Epilogue - "The campfire embers are black and cold./The banjos are broken, the stories are told,/The woods are cut down and the young are grown old" - Ben was shattered, and he broke down. Ironic, wasn't it?, to find himself confronting a litany for himself that he'd written in 1940! For the rest of us, too. I remember still, very vividly, how tender and loving Peter was, congratulating him on finding so many different ways of harmonizing F (the last few bars of Bunyan), which made Ben smile again.[226]

A few weeks before Britten died, he anxiously asked his nurse Rita Thompson what she thought it would be like to die. She told him that it would be like going to sleep and that he would be reunited with his old friends in death. "Wystan will be at the top of the stairs, waiting for you!" she said, and Britten laughed.[227]

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[226]Carpenter, Britten, 574.

[227]Carpenter, Britten, 580.

The History of Our Hunting Fathers

Britten's diary for January 2nd, 1936 reads:

> Auden comes back here for a meal at 7:30. We talk amongst many things of a new Song Cycle (probably on Animals) that I may write. Very nice and interesting and pleasant evening.[228]

In an undated note to Britten, Auden discusses the title of the work.

> Dear Benjamin
> Many thanks for letter. No, I don't think Auden and, on, or versus Animals is a good title. The only thing I can think of is "The two/other Kingdom(s)." I'll have a stab at modernizing Rats a little and send it you in a day or so. I am my own agent in these two poems (Our hunting fathers has been published in the Listener) so get/give me the best terms you can. If I think you're cheating me, I'll send them to Curtis Brown [Auden's literary agent].[229]
>
> Love,
> WYSTAN

On February 18th, Britten met with "Mr. Graham Goodes (the very objectionable, self-important, bumptious and altogether despicable secretary of the Norwich Festival)."[230] Mr. Goodes at this lunch meeting commissioned the work for the Norfolk and Norwich

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[228]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 392.

[229]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 392.

[230]Britten, diary entry for Feb. 18, 1936; quoted in Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 36.

Triennial Festival at which Britten's teacher Frank Bridge had had his own works performed.[231] Britten wrote in his diary:

> I find it most difficult to make [Goodes] come round to letting me do a vocal suite ([with] Sophie Wyss) for the Sept. festival. In fact, I'm convinced it was only to give himself airs that he ever queried it.[232]

Sophie Wyss was a Swiss soprano for whom Britten was writing Our Hunting Fathers. He later wrote the song cycles On This Island and Les Illuminations for her also.[233] Britten was happy with Wyss's work on Our Hunting Fathers and On This Island.[234] After Britten started to work with Peter Pears, however, he became dissatisfied with Wyss's performance of Les Illuminations, and with Wyss's singing in general.[235] In 1942, he wrote:

> "Les Illuminations" goes on steadily - mostly with Sophie, I'm afraid, although Peter has shown people now how it really goes. Did I tell you how disappointing her show of it is? So hopelessly

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[231]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 32.

[232]Britten, diary entry for Feb. 18, 1936; quoted in Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 36.

[233]Mitchell, intro., Letters, by Britten, 66.

[234]Britten, Letters, 512.

[235]Carpenter, Britten, 177-78.

> inefficient, subjective and (of all things) so coy and whimsey [sic]!!![236]

In a letter to Pears, Britten wrote about a performance of Durey's Images (1918) in which Britten and Wyss both took part. Britten wrote that Sophie was "screaming away" and contrasted her singing unfavorably to that of Pears.[237] After Britten and Pears returned to England in 1942, Britten wanted Peter to sing Les Illuminations instead of Sophie.[238] Humphrey Carpenter writes, "In consequence of [Britten and Pears's] widening reputation [as a duo], Sophie Wyss lost her position as foremost interpreter of Britten's vocal music."[239]

Britten dedicated Our Hunting Fathers to Ralph Hawkes, a director of the music publishers Boosey and Hawkes, in gratitude for the moral and financial support which he had offered the young composer.[240] Britten described Hawkes as "a really charming person" whom success hadn't "spoilt . . . in the slightest . . . he is delightfully un-snobbish."[241] A publishing colleague of

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[236]Britten, Letters, vol. 2, 1089.

[237]Britten, Letters, vol. 2, 1080.

[238]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 2, 1082.

[239]Carpenter, Britten, 177.

[240]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 338-39.

[241]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 454.

Hawkes's, Bailey Bird, said, "as far as I know he was not musically educated, but he had an exceptional ear andappreciation of contemporary music."[242] Hawkes was an important early advocate of Britten's music. He persuaded the Chairman of Boosey and Hawkes to take on Britten's music and pay him a retainer, even though Britten's music was not yet making much money. This retainer enabled Britten to survive in the early days and continue composing.[243] Hawkes's colleague Bailey Bird said,

> [Hawkes] was certain that [Britten] was going to be the saviour of British music . . . He was so convinced about this man's talent - there was no question . . . It was just a case of waiting . . . He had the patience to wait and wait - till it happened.[244]

On April 11th, 1936, Britten wrote in his diary that he was "getting ideas formulated for the Animal work," partly inspired by his current study of Stravinsky's Duo Concertant for violin and piano.[245] Later that month Britten flew to Barcelona for the festival of the International Society of Contemporary Music, where he performed his Suite for Violin and Piano

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[242]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 338-39.

[243]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 339.

[244]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 339.

[245]Carpenter, Britten, 80.

with violinist Tony Brosa.[246] Before he left he wrote a letter to his friend John Pounder which illustrates his feelings about the tense political situation in Europe:

> Well, mon cher, I go to bonny Barcelona on Friday - going by air as time is so short and I can't go before . . . Anyhow, I shall probably Crash - and even a hot death like that will probably be more pleasant than a slow one in mustard gas! What price Naziland?[247]

Britten goes on to discuss the National Government of England's now infamous policy of appeasement with regard to Hitler:

> The great question seems to be: if Great Britain had taken a firm stand with France, Russia, Belgium etc. from the beginning, would the effect have been in Germany (a) the fall of Hitler . . . or (b) a united Germany . . . standing behind Hitler for the sake of Der Vaterland? . . . Many people fear (b). . . . What is thine opinion? I favour (a). Anyhow one must do something - not flounder about like the dear Nat Gov [National Government]. The trouble is that so many people believe the danger of war now passed - living in a fool's Paradise (or Garden of Eden[248], what!)[249]

Donald Mitchell writes that "Britten's diaries for the period when he was actually putting Our Hunting Fathers together are unusually full of political comments

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[246]Britten, Letters, 421-26.

[247]Britten, Letters, 417-18.

[248]Anthony Eden was the British Foreign Secretary. See Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 420-21.

[249]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 418.

and observations," and that "the particular tensions and anxieties of the summer of 1936 formed part of the imagination out of which Our Hunting Fathers was created."[250] The two situations which were most in the news at the time and with which Britten was most concerned were those in Ethiopia (then called Abyssinia) and in Spain. In September of 1935, Mussolini, dictator of Italy, ordered his troops to invade Abyssinia, which was then ruled by the emperor Haile Selassie, also known as Ras Tafari Makonnen. Not only did Mussolini want to enlarge Italy's holdings: he also wanted "war for war's sake, since fascism needs the glory of a victory." He wanted "to make Italy great, respected, and feared."[251]

On October 3rd, 1935, Italian planes began dropping bombs on Ethiopian towns. Emilio De Bono, the Italian general in charge of the invasion, claimed that the targets were military, but, in fact, the bombers did not refrain from striking large civilian populations, including women and children, and even hospitals.[252] Vittorio Mussolini, Benito Mussolini's eldest son, was one of the pilots in the initial raid. His remarks reveal the

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[250]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 33-34.

[251]Christopher Hibbert, Mussolini: A Biography (New York: 1983), 96; quoted in Large, 145.

[252]Large, 162-63, 266.

sadism of the bombers and acknowledge the fact that civilians were targeted.

> I noticed with regret [he said] that [my bombs] did not create any sensational effects. Perhaps I was so disappointed because I had expected the huge explosions and flames I had seen in American war movies. Unfortunately, the mud-and-grass Ethiopian houses were just not designed to provide a satisfactory target to a bomber.[253]

The bombings continued for months. The Italian planes even dropped dichlorodiethyl sulfide (the "mustard gas" which Britten mentioned in his letter to John Pounder) from their planes, both on Ethiopian troops and on densely populated villages. One Ethiopian chief remembers:

> On the morning of December 23 . . . we saw several planes appear. . . . the enemy dropped strange containers that burst open almost as soon as they hit the ground or water, releasing pools of colorless liquid. I hardly had time to ask myself what could be happening before a hundred or so of my men who had been splashed by the mysterious fluid began to scream in agony as blisters broke out on their bare feet, their hands, their faces. Some who rushed to the river and took great gulps of water to cool their fevered lips, fell contorted on the banks and writhed in agonies that lasted for hours before they died . . . My chiefs surrounded me, asking wildly what they should do, but I was completely stunned. I didn't know what to tell

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[253]Vittorio Mussolini, Bomber uber Abessinien (Munich, 1937), 25; quoted in Large, 162-63.

> them. I didn't know how to fight this terrible rain that burned and killed.[254]

By May, 1936, the Ethiopian situation had reached a crisis. Britten's diary entry for May 4th and 5th reads:

> The Italian-Abyssinian war is nearing its close. Addis-Ababa [the Abyssinian capital] is in a state of confusion, the Emperor [Haile Selassie] (fine man) has fled & most of his generals & what with Italians and native looters it is in a bad way. Mussolini's war of civilization is at an end. What country will be in need of treatment now?[255]

By May, 1936, Britten was working regularly on the composition of Our Hunting Fathers. His work did not always progress smoothly. Sometimes he would run out of ideas and have to leave work on one of the songs to go to another. Donald Mitchell writes that, although Britten's music sounds "unlaboured,"

> [Britten's] diaries prove that very quality of spontaneity was an aspect of a virtuoso technique that had to be worked at as hard as at any other and often took a significant time to achieve.[256]

Britten would often go on walks to gain inspiration before he composed. On May 12, Britten wrote,

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[254]Angelo del Boca, The Ethiopian War, 1935-1941 (Chicago, 1969), 78-79; quoted in Large, 173.

[255]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 34-35.

[256]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 41.

> Go for a tremendous walk over Hampstead Heath practically all the morning - after an energetic practice - trying to finish "Rats" in my mind. But it won't work - it is a pig. I get back for lunch and settle down to think in the afternoon - but infinite telephone calls distract me entirely and I eventually go off to tennis at 5:30.[257]

Britten's mother, who was now a widow, was living at the resort Frinton-on-Sea in Essex.[258] Britten stayed there with her during the entire month of June.[259] On June 11th, Britten writes in his diary,

> After dinner I play it [the day's work] over a lot and describe it [Our Hunting Fathers] in detail to Mum. She disapproves very thoroughly of "Rats" - but that is almost an incentive - no actual insult to her tho'.[260]

On June 23rd, he wrote to John Pounder,

> I have been here working hard for the whole of June. . . . I have been working all the time on the work I'm to do for the Norwich Festival. Words are partly written and scheme devised by Wystan Auden - and it's pretty good - very satirical, and likely to cause a good amount of comment - especially the prayer to God to rid the house of rats. . . . Consequently you can imagine the setting isn't exactly reverent - words are lovely - Anglo Saxon modernized by W. H. A[uden]. The rest is similar - a lament for a dead Monkey and a Hunting Song - I enjoyed that one! . . I refuse to talk of politics, it is so depressing - especially at the moment. It

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[257]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 34.

[258]Carpenter, Britten, 83.

[259]Carpenter, Britten, 83; Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 428.

[260]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 39.

> is a faint hope that the Socialists will have done anything to-day in Parliament.[261]

In these last two sentences, Britten was writing of England's failure to impose sanctions against the fascist government of Italy to pressure it to withdraw from Abyssinia.[262]

In July, Mrs. Britten left Frinton, not planning to return until September.[263] On July 7, Britten arrived in Cornwall. There he stayed in a hut at Crantock at Newquay on the property of the Nettleship family.[264] Britten wrote in his diary:

> It is perfectly glorious country - a glorious little village - and, o, the sea view! - so I can foresee a pretty pleasant month - working at Hunting Fathers - reading a lot and walking the neighbourhood.[265]

The next day Britten resumed work on the score of the song cycle, completing the scoring of the "Prologue." For relaxation he studied the scores to Mahler symphonies and the later Beethoven quartets.[266] Britten found the

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[261]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 429.

[262]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 430.

[263]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 428.

[264]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 432.

[265]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 432.

[266]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 432.

work on Our Hunting Fathers exciting. The beach and countryside provided wonderful inspiration and relaxation.[267] The political situation in Europe remained tense. On July 18th, the fascist Francisco Franco led a military rebellion against the Spanish government. The Spanish Civil War had begun. On July 20th, Britten wrote in his diary, "Spanish revolution - those bloody fascists trying to get back into power. However it seems as tho [sic] the Government and people have the situation in hand."[268] Unfortunately, they did not. The fighting continued and the fascists continued to make advances. On July 28th, Britten wrote to his mother,

> By the way, isn't it frightful about Barcelona? Toni and Peggy [Brosa] are still there - he's playing first night at the Proms and no Spaniards are allowed out.[269] Judging by all accounts (and I bought every paper, from Times to Herald, the last few days) the government is gaining ground all round. But what about the fascists lining up all the little Popular Front boys against a wall & putting the machine guns on them? Imagine English boys of 14 even knowing what Popular Front means - much less dying for it.[270]

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[267]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 432, 434.

[268]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 434.

[269]Toni Brosa was the violinist who had played Britten's Suite for Violin and Piano in Barcelona in April.

[270]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 435-36.

Britten continued to write about Spain in his diaries throughout 1936.[271] On November 5th, Britten wrote, "Madrid bombed by air for umpteenth time. No. ofchildren killed not specified. Seventy were killed in one go the other day, What price Facism [sic]?"[272]

Britten finished the full score of Our Hunting Fathers on Thursday, July 23rd amidst great mental turbulence about the Spanish situation. On this day he wrote in his diary:[273]

> Rather a beastly day - spoilt by Spanish news. There has been a lot more fighting and the Government doesn't seem entirely on top - there seems to be a lot of dirty work going on - rich people outside helping those bloody fascists. I actually finish the score of H.F. working till 11:30 at night - owing to these disturbances I don't work well and I'm very doubtful about the end.[274]

The next day Britten felt better about his work:

> . . . I am exhilarated at having finished Hunting Fathers. Spend day - numbering pages, doing titles, index, cueing, general expression and tempo marks etc. - which is good fun, especially as I am at the moment thrilled with the work.[275]

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[271]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 438-39.

[272]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 439.

[273]Kennedy, Britten, 21.

[274]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 46.

[275]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 46.

On the same day Britten's friend, the composer Lennox Berkeley, whom he had met at the ISCM Festival in Barcelona in April, arrived for a visit.[276] In addition to enjoying the countryside, the two composers played the four-hand portions of the piano reduction of Our Hunting Fathers which Britten had begun to write for publication.[277]

On August 22nd, Sophie Wyss and her husband, Arnold Gyde, arrived in Cornwall so that Sophie could rehearse Our Hunting Fathers with Britten.[278] On August 26th Britten wrote in his diary, "Have a long rehearsal in Village Hall with Sophie at Our H.F. - she is beginning to sing it very well indeed."[279] In a radio talk, Sophie Wyss described what it was like to work with Britten. She found the rehearsals challenging. Britten would urge her on

> to do the almost impossible, then he would go out in the garden and play French cricket with my ten-years-old [sic] son. Finally we would all dine together and he would talk with bitter humour about the way the world was drifting to war.[280]

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[276]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 436.

[277]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 436-37.

[278]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 442-43.

[279]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 443.

[280]Kennedy, Britten, 21.

On September 3rd, Britten wrote that he was "very proud" of Our Hunting Fathers. He acknowledged that, since the work was "very satirical," it probably was "likely to cause a good amount of comment."[281] Britten was not prepared for the reactions of the members of the orchestra themselves, however. On September 19th Britten rehearsed the London Philharmonic Orchestra at Covent Garden for the premiere. He describes the traumatic event in his diary:

> At 6:00 we (Beth [Britten's sister], Sophie [Wyss] and Arnold [Gyde]) come back to Covent Garden and then begins the most catastrophic [sic] evening of my life. Waiting till 8:30 to begin the rehearsal of Our Hunting Fathers - the orchestra (fourth day of 9 hours rehearsal) is at the end of it's [sic] tether - no discipline at all - no one there to enforce it. I get thoroughly het up and disparate [sic] - can't hear a thing in the wretched Foyer. I get a lot of the speeds wrong and very muddled - but I'm glad to say that in spite of the fooling in the orchestra and titters at the work - the "Rats" especially brought shreaks [sic] of laughter - the rehearsal got better and better. But it was impossible and takes all Arnold's optimism and kindness when he and S. take Beth and me to a nice meal at Strand Pal. to cheer me at all - but I'm feeling pretty suicidal.[282]

Sophie Wyss described the same rehearsal in these words:

> . . . the members of the orchestra were not used to that kind of music and played about disgracefully.

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[281]Carpenter, Britten, 86.

[282]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 443.

> When the reference to rats came in the score they ran about pretending they were chasing rats on the floor! They kept asking to leave the room, one after another. It was quite impossible to rehearse at all, the rehearsal broke up in disorder. Poor Benjamin, it was a terrible experience for him, there did not seem to be a chance of a performance at all in Norwich.[283]

Wyss noted that Ralph Vaughan Williams, who was present at the rehearsal, reproved the orchestra for its childish behavior. The orchestra, said Wyss, pulled itself together and gave a satisfactory performance of the work.[284]

On September 22nd a preview of the work appeared in the Eastern Daily Press. In it, Britten was quoted as saying, "The work is difficult, both for orchestra and for the soloist, who has a most exacting part throughout. But Sophie Wyss, who is singing the work, makes light of these difficulties."[285] The reporter went on to size up the young Britten"s accomplishments and reputation as a Wunderkind:

> . . . in this work we shall be hearing the music of a young English composer whose strong individuality and marked originality have already brought him exceptional distinction in the musical world. For all that he is still in the very early twenties Britten has twice had the honour of having works

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[283]Beth Britten, My Brother Benjamin (The Kensal Press, 1987), 92; quoted in Carpenter, Britten, 86.

[284]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 443.

[285]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 445.

> chosen for and performed at the International Contemporary Music Festivals of 1934 and 1936, and both his choral and orchestral music has frequently appeared in the programmes of the B.B.C.[286]

The premiere of Our Hunting Fathers took place on Friday, September 25, 1936 at 11:30 a.m. at St. Andrew's Hall, Norwich, for the Norfolk and Norwich Thirty-fourth Triennial Musical Festival. Benjamin Britten conducted the London Philharmonic Orchestra with Sophie Wyss as soprano soloist. Preceding Our Hunting Fathers on the same program, Vaughan Williams conducted his work, Five Tudor Portraits.[287] In his diary for that day, Britten wrote:

> . . . V. Williams conducts a very successful show of his 5 Tudor Portraits (1st perf.) - not my music, but obviously the music for the audience. . . . I conduct 1st perf. of my Hunting Fathers with Sophie Wyss - who is excellent indeed. The orchestra plays better than I had dared to hope - tho' one or two slips. I am very pleased with it and it goes down quite well - most of the audience being very interested if bewildered. A very complimentary and excited gathering in the artist's room afterwards . . .[288]

The audience at the Norwich Festival was conservative. Donald Mitchell writes that

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[286]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 445-46.

[287]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 446.

[288]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 446-47.

> the Norwich Festival took place in one of the hearts of rural England and was likely to be attended and supported by the local gentry whose hunting habits and customs were to come under scrutiny in [Our Hunting Fathers].[289]

Some members of the audience were even shocked by the Five Tudor Portraits of the more musically conservative Vaughan Williams. The elderly Countess of Albemarle, upon hearing the text of the Vaughan Williams piece, which she considered bawdy, turned purple in the face and walked out of the hall, loudly exclaiming, "disgusting!"[290] Britten's sister Beth believed that Our Hunting Fathers had not been a wise choice of music to play for the Norwich audience.[291] Britten's mother, who was in the audience, said to a friend after the performance, "Oh, I do hope one day Ben will write something that somebody will like."[292]

Reviews of the performance were mostly unfavorable. The critics disapproved of the complexity of the music and of the Auden poems (one critic said Auden's poems read

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[289]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 38-39.

[290]Kennedy, 22.

[291]Beth Britten, My Brother Benjamin, 92; quoted in Carpenter, Britten, 88.

[292]Carpenter, Britten, 88-89.

like clues to a crossword puzzle).[293] Many critics admitted not to being able to understand Auden's text or Britten's music. Britten was accused of being "clever" at the expense of accessibility. Sophie Wyss's performance was generally praised, except for comments that she sometimes seemed nervous and that her diction could be better. The reviewers in general seemed to be alienated by the music and were perhaps envious of the virtuosity and daring of the young composer.[294]

The review of H. C. Colles of The Times was particularly scathing:

> We are not able to say with . . . definiteness what . . . "Our Hunting Fathers" has contributed. It was kindly received, either because the composer is the youngest of the products of East Anglia represented here, or because he so evidently knows exactly what sort of sound he wants to make at every moment, or because his singer, Miss Sophie Wyss, showed herself almost as clever as he is, or because his audience shares with him some sense of music or of humour, or both, to which we are strangers. Anyhow, we will not be accused of being intolerant . . . like the Lion of his epilogue. Though only now 23 he is no newcomer. His earlier works have made their mark, and perhaps this one will; or, if it is just a stage to be got through, we wish him safely and quickly through it.[295]

Colles goes on to compare Britten's piece unfavorably with Vaughan Williams's Five Tudor Portraits.

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[293]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 448.

[294]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 447-49.

[295]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 448.

> [Vaughan Williams's piece is] real folk music, every note of it his own, but music for real people to sing and enjoy, music that is merry and serious at the same time. We wish we knew whether young Britten's music is meant to be either.[296]

The critic A. H. Fox Strangways of the Observer was equally scathing. He called Britten's work "dire nonsense."

> Since, however, those parts which W. H. Auden has directly contributed to the text of "Our Hunting Fathers" remain obscure after a tenth reading, judgement of Mr. Britten's composition as a whole would be unfair. But it did seem, all things considered, that what he had done was hardly worth doing, and that, having done it, he would have served his reputation better had he remained like the hunting fathers at the end of Auden's text (or is it the present generation? - or the lion?) anonymous.[297]

Edwin Evans of the Musical Times acknowledged Britten's technical skill but called the work "clever almost to a fault." He judged that the work was "teasing, irritating or enjoyable according to the way you take it."[298]

Basil Maine of the Eastern Daily Press was more sympathetic:

> Both for performers and audience the music is exacting, being uncompromising and of an uncommonly

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[296]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 449.

[297]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 449.

[298]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 449.

> dry quality. But it has the great merit of being positive and individual. It is not in the slightest problematic. . . . The question for the listener to settle is whether the composer, being clear, is communicating to him a vital experience and communicating it with "the rightness of a god" - for of every creative artist we ask as much.[299]

Britten reacted by writing in his diary that he was pleased that his work was not more popular with the reviewers, "because what could be the use of a work of this kind if the narrow-minded, prejudiced, snobbish Colles (for instance) approved?"[300]

Britten's teacher Frank Bridge was ambivalent about the piece. He did not like the vocal writing, "but was very sweet about Our Hunting Fathers," wrote Britten in 1963:

> He didn't really like it, but he defended it. Later he gave me a long talking to about the scoring, which he thought didn't work (he liked the approach to the individual instruments). He was severe on the last movement as being too edgy, and in the end I did change it.[301]

Bridge, who was sick for two weeks in December 1936, spoke about Our Hunting Fathers in his fever, "slanging audience at Norwich for not taking my 'Hunting Fathers' more

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[299]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 447-48.

[300]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 447.

[301]Benjamin Britten, "Britten Looking Back," Sunday Telegraph, November 17, 1963; quoted in Kennedy, 22.

seriously!!" wrote Britten in his diary on December 17.[302]

In October, Britten's friend John Pounder wrote to tell him that he had enjoyed the performance at Norwich of Our Hunting Fathers.[303] Britten wrote (belatedly) on January 2nd, 1937 to thank him:

> I enjoyed your letter alot [sic]. It was very nice of you to write. I was certainly very disappointed to have missed you at Norwich. . . . I'm also very glad you liked Hunting Fathers. I personally think it's opus 1 right[304] - and a lot [sic] of people I admire think so to [sic]. The BBC. [sic] are very slow in deciding to do it. Perhaps the political suggestions worries [sic] them.[305]

On April 30, 1937, Our Hunting Fathers was broadcast on the BBC radio with Sophie Wyss and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Adrian Boult. Britten's teacher Frank Bridge was not optimistic about the work's chances for becoming a part of the permanent repertoire, however:

> The quintessence of disappointment on your young face [following the performance] was so marked that

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[302]Britten, Letters, 459.

[303]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 464.

[304]That is, the work in which Britten found his true voice as a composer. Our Hunting Fathers was actually his opus 8. His real opus 1 was the Sinfonietta for chamber orchestra.

[305]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 464.

> had I had a few minutes alone with you, I might have consoled you with the fact "that many a good work has begun its public life in much the same indifferent way." It is extremely hard to bear, but one must and I suppose does, anyway. Of course, a real blot on the prog., having a further display of xylophone colour immediately,[306] was perfectly sickening for me. And surely for you too. You'll have to reconcile yourself about even the smaller public getting to know your work. Opportunities are not likely to be many.[307]

As a matter of fact, Our Hunting Fathers was not revived until June 1950 at Chelsea Town Hall with Pears singing the solo part. The Chelsea Symphony Orchestra played under the direction of Norman Del Mar.[308] "Thus," writes Donald Mitchell, "a work central to the understanding of Britten's music in the thirties [was] left mute and unperformed for over a decade."[309] In later years, Britten did not make much mention of Our Hunting Fathers, but on September 17th, 1957, he referred in a letter to "a very early work of mine called 'Our Hunting Fathers' . . . rather wild, but I think interesting."[310] In 1963, in an interview with Murray

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[306]"Leighton Lucas's Sinfonia Brevis for horn and eleven instruments, which incorporated Javanese gamelan effects" (Mitchell, note, Letters, 433). The last movement of Our Hunting Fathers is dominated by a xylophone solo.

[307]Britten, Letters, 433.

[308]Britten, Letters, 449.

[309]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 449.

[310]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 450.

Schafer for his book, British Composers in Interview,Britten said, "I think Our Hunting Fathers was [Auden's and my] most successful collaboration."[311] Colin Matthews, however, told Humphrey Carpenter that "Ben was still diffident about the piece in 1976 - I remember him saying that he was slightly embarrassed by it, particularly 'Messalina' [the third song] which he described as 'over the top.'"[312]

Our Hunting Fathers is still not nearly so well known as Britten's later vocal works. It is by no means a common work on symphony orchestra programs. Three recordings, however, are readily available, with Peter Pears,[313] Phyllis Bryn-Julson,[314] and Elisabeth Sšderstršm.[315]

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[311]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 464; Murray Schafer, British Composers in Interview (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 115.

[312]Humphrey Carpenter, Britten, 89.

[313]Benjamin Britten, Our Hunting Fathers, Peter Pears, Benjamin Britten, London Symphony Orchestra, LP, REGL 417 MONO, BBC Records, 1981.

[314]Benjamin Britten, Our Hunting Fathers, Phyllis Bryn-Julson, Steuart Bedford, English Chamber Orchestra, compact disc, 11922, Collins Classics, 1991.

[315]Benjamin Britten, Our Hunting Fathers, Elisabeth Sšderstršm, Richard Armstrong, Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, compact disc, 7 69522 2, 1983.

CHAPTER III

THE TEXT OF OUR HUNTING FATHERS

Auden's Works and Style

Auden's writings include poems, plays, opera libretti, narration for documentary films, translations, essays, and reviews of other authors' works. For a list of and information about Auden's published writings, see W. H. Auden, A Bibliography 1924-1969, second edition, by B. C. Bloomfield and Edward Mendelson.[1]

Auden's works were known for their objectivity and clinical detachment. His poems tend to contain "intellectual pronouncements rather than sensuous images."[2] Auden believed in the need for strict discipline, objectivity, and analysis.[3] This detachment was best exemplified by the character of the airman, who

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[1]B. C. Bloomfield and Edward Mendelson, W. H. Auden, A Bibliography, 1924-1969, 2nd ed. (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1974). A third edition of this book is in preparation (see Carpenter, W. H. Auden, 459).

[2]Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 71.

[3]Hoggart, 34.

sees things from a great height.[4] One of Auden's early poems begins, "Consider this and in our time/As the hawk sees it or the helmeted airman."[5] Auden's friend and fellow writer Stephen Spender spoke of Auden's tendency to intellectualize his experience:

> Auden has always had to a remarkable degree this capacity to think of everything and everyone as a cipher within a pattern which he has invented to explain life in his own mind. He also has a remarkable gift for inventing the most inclusive imagery to explain how the different factors round him fit into the general pattern which he sees so clearly.[6]

Auden was known to be a highly efficient and virtuosic craftsman. His poetry was extremely precise. He was able to pick out and portray significant and representative details of a situation. His poems contained, according to the critic Richard Hoggart, "pithy item-by-item detail and comment." Hoggart characterized these "concise and pithy phrases" as "sociological or psychological epigrams." He describes Auden's style with words such as "acute," "penetrating," "epigrammatic" and

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[4]Hoggart, 27-30.

[5]W. H. Auden, Selected Poems, 2nd ed., ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1989), 14.

[6]Stephen Spender, "W. H. Auden at Oxford," World Review, August 1949; quoted in Hoggart, 70.

"stimulating."[7] The following passage from Auden's "Dover" illustrates these aspects of Auden's style:

> Steep roads, a tunnel through the downs, are the approaches;
> A ruined pharos overlooks a constructed
> The sea-front is almost elegant; all this show
> Has, somewhere inland, a vague and dirty root:
> Nothing is made in this town.[8]

When Auden used scenery, it was

> either a backcloth against which some human situation is considered or a symbol for some activity of the psyche; in neither case is it regarded as of much interest in itself.[9]

Hoggart goes on to say that

> Auden's particular settings, whether urban or natural, are usually stark. He likes all places in which are shown with special clarity the curious distortions of personality that a mechanical civilization produces, all places heavily engraved with the tortuous manifestations of social activity - "My heart has stamped on/The view from Birmingham to Wolverhampton" - and especially with that activity in decline, with "dismantled washing-floors," "ramshackle engines," "disused factories, worked-out mines," "derelict ironworks on deserted coasts," "tramlines and slagheaps, pieces of machinery."[10]

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[7]Hoggart, 30, 66-71.

[8]Hoggart, 67.

[9]Hoggart, 24.

[10]Hoggart, 25.

This imagery is sharp and biting, rather than sensual. Auden himself admitted that his visual sense was poor. He defended himself by writing, ". . . as a poet, one of the most important lessons one has to learn is to recognize and accept one's limitations and, if possible, turn them into advantages."[11] Christopher Isherwood remembers Auden holding forth at Oxford on his ideas about poetry:

> Of course, intellect's the only thing that matters at all . . . I've absolutely no use for colour. Only form. . . Poetry's got to be made up of images of form. I hate sunsets and flowers.[12]

In a 1936 poem, Auden wrote, "to me Art's subject is the human clay,/And landscape but a background to a torso."[13]

Auden was well-read and capable of imitating other poets' styles when it suited him. His poems often contain references to the work of other writers or are about the writers themselves.[14] Titles of some of these poems are "Rimbaud," "A. E. Housman," "Edward Lear," "In Memory of

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[11]Carpenter, Auden, 358.

[12]Christopher Isherwood, Lions and Shadows: An Education in the Twenties (Hogarth Press, 1938), 189; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 61.

[13]Auden, Letter to Lord Byron, in The English Auden, 185.

[14]Hoggart, 42-45.

W. B. Yeats," "In Memory of Ernst Toller," "Voltaire at Ferney," "Herman Melville," "At the Grave of Henry James," and "Ode to the Medieval Poets."[15]

Unlike the modernists who preceded him, such as Yeats, D. H. Lawrence, Eliot, and Pound, Auden did not indulge in nostalgia for a lost idyllic past. The critic Edward Mendelson writes:

> The past his poems envisioned was never a southern classical domain of unreflective elegance, as it was for the modernists, but a past that had always been ruined, a northern industrial landscape marred by the same violence and sorrow that marred his own.[16]

Some early influences on Auden's poetry were identified in the section on Auden's life in Chapter II. His early works were also often modeled on ancient Icelandic sagas. Dante's influence can be seen on Auden's poems of the 1930s. In the 1940s he was inspired by Shakespeare and in the 1960s by Goethe.[17]

Auden's early works have a reputation for being obscure. They contain many private jokes which could only be understood by a small circle of his friends, but even they found his poems baffling. According to Edward

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[15] W. H. Auden, Collected Poems, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), 148-49, 197-200, 242, 647

[16]Mendelson, Preface to Selected Poems, by Auden, ix.

[17]Mendelson, Preface to Selected Poems, by Auden, x.

Mendelson, these early poems, influenced by the modernist poet T. S. Eliot,

> often have the air of gnomic fragments; they seem to be elements of some hidden private myth whose individual details never quite resolve themselves into a unified narrative . . . [they] adopt a recurrent tone of foreboding and threat . . . The elusiveness and indecipherability . . . are part of their meaning: they enact the isolation they describe.[18]

Many of Auden's works in the 1930s were political, often specifically communist, in tone, such as the poem, "A Communist to Others." In these poems, Auden sought to communicate more directly with his readers than he had in his earlier poems. In his works from the 1930s, his language is sometimes popular, influenced by the cabaret and music hall. In these works he would sometimes preach directly at his audience in order to convey a political message.[19] In fact, he often fancied himself as a type of lunatic clergyman.[20] Auden's political philosophy was rather vague, however, and he realized that many of his readers were interpreting his poems in a manner to suit their own ends. In addition, Auden was beginning to doubt the ability of the poet to affect society. In 1939, he

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[18]Mendelson, Preface to Selected Poems, by Auden, xii.

[19]Hoggart, 37-41.

[20]Carpenter, Auden, 61, 67, 301-2, 321, 425.

left England, partly because he no longer wanted the responsibility of being the head of a political movement in poetry.

In the 1940s, Auden turned inward in his poems to the private realm.[21] For this reason, his later poetry often received unfavorable reviews. Carpenter writes that "most reviewers admired Auden's continuing technical skill, but objected to the cozy tone of many poems . . . which they felt amounted to smugness."[22] Auden still cared about the state of the world, however. He generously contributed money to help pay for the education of several young people who he heard were unable to pay their own way through school. He gave shelter at his Austrian summer house to a Hungarian refugee couple in 1957. The reason his later poems were not political was that he had become discouraged about the poet's power to affect political attitudes. "I know that all the verse I wrote, all the positions I took in the thirties, didn't save a single Jew," said Auden.[23]

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[21]Mendelson, Preface to Selected Poems, by W. H. Auden, xiii-xiv, xvi.

[22]Carpenter, Auden, 413.

[23]Carpenter, Auden, 413.

Animals in Auden's Writings

Auden in his writings used animals sometimes in a literal sense, and sometimes in order to symbolize aspects of the human unconscious. In Auden: An Introductory Essay, Richard Hoggart writes of Auden's attitude toward animals:

> Auden may have little interest in pastoral things, but he frequently refers to brute beasts. He remarks - as Blake does in the "Songs of Innocence and Experience" - on the animals' mental stillness, their natural goodness or neutrality, their moral calm as compared with the fever of the "double man." They remind him of the necessities of the human condition. In that we have reason and imagination, we are freer than the animals; but we also bear responsibilities, the inescapable obligation to make moral choices. We are capable of guilt, which they are not: "The animals, whose evolution is complete, whose knowledge of their relations with the rest of creation is fixed, can do evil, but they cannot sin."[24]

One notable example of a work in which Auden used animals to symbolize human traits is The Dog beneath the Skin, written in 1935, the year before Our Hunting Fathers. There are many references to animals and animal disguises, and two characters are even named after animals. Sir Francis Crewe, the young Baronet from the village of Pressan Ambo, quarrels with his father and

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[24]Richard Hoggart, Auden: An Introductory Essay (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), 101-2. The last sentence (in quotation marks) is a quote from Auden's note to line 607 of his 1941 poem "New Year Letter" in the volume The Double Man (New York: Random House, 1941), 107.

secretly dons a dog's skin as a disguise. As a 'dog," he is adopted by one family in the village after another. He learns their secrets and finds out how bestial the villagers really are. Still disguised as a dog, he follows Alan Norman, who has been selected by the villagers to find Francis, far and wide, to the countries of Ostnia and Westland (Germany). At the end of the play, Alan and Francis return to Pressan Ambo. Francis reveals himself to the villagers, taking off his dog's skin, and the villagers of Pressan Ambo don animal masks which reveal their bestial characteristics. The general becomes a bull, the vicar becomes a goat, Francis' sister Iris becomes a cat, and Mrs. Hotham (another animal name) becomes a turkey.[25]

In April 1937 Auden wrote the well-known "Ballad of Miss Gee." Miss Gee is a sexually repressed old maid. In this poem, Auden uses a bull to represent male sexuality:

> She dreamed a dream one evening
> That she was the Queen of France
> And the Vicar of Saint Aloysius
> Asked Her Majesty to dance.
>
> But a storm blew down the palace,
> She was biking through a field of corn,
> And a bull with the face of the Vicar
> Was charging with lowered horn.
> She could feel his hot breath behind her,

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[25]W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood, "The Dog beneath the Skin, Or, Where Is Francis?" in Two Great Plays: The Dog beneath the Skin and The Ascent of F6 (New York: Random House, 1936), 1-112.

He was going to overtake;
And the bicycle went slower and slower
Because of that back-pedal brake.[26]

In 1941, when Auden and Britten were in America, they wrote an operetta, Paul Bunyan, in which animals played an important part. Major animal characters in this opera include Moppet and Poppet, two cats in Paul Bunyan's lumber camp, and Fido, a dog who also lives with the lumberjacks. In addition, Auden and Britten wrote minor parts for three geese, a beetle, and a squirrel. The animals in this opera have more common sense than man but cannot aspire to the same lofty heights. The animals comment on man's civilized qualities and aspirations, sometimes with scorn and sometimes with admiration.

In the Prologue to the opera, the trees of the forest, which have never before seen man, ask: "What is a man?" The three wild geese reply:

A man is a form of life
That dreams in order to act
And acts in order to dream
And has a name of his own.

[Young Trees and Chorus of Old Trees]: What is this name?

[Three Wild Geese]: Paul Bunyan.
[Chorus of Old Trees]: How silly.

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[26]Auden, Selected Poems, 56.

In the duet, "Cat's Creed" (Number 22 of the opera), Moppet and Poppet assert their superiority over man and dog:

> [Moppet and Poppet]:
> Let Man the romantic in vision espy
> A far better world than his own in the sky
> As a tyrant or beauty express a vain wish
> To be mild as a beaver or chaste as a fish.
>
> Let the dog who's the most sentimental of all
> Throw a languishing glance at the hat in the hall,
> Struggle wildly to speak all the tongues that he hears
> And to rise to the realm of Platonic ideas.
>
> But the cat is an Aristotelian and proud
> Preferring hard fact to intangible cloud;
> Like the troll in Peer Gynt, both in hunting and love,
>
> The cat has one creed: "To thyself be enough!"
>
> [Poppet]: Let's go and kill birds.

In the Animal Trio (Number 8), however, Fido, Moppet and Poppet delineate the ways in which animals and man help each other:

> [Fido]: The single creature lives a partial life,
> Man by his eye and by his nose the hound;
> He needs the deep emotions I can give
> Through him I sense a vaster hunting-ground.
>
> [Moppet and Poppet]:
> Like draws to like, to share is to relieve,
> And sympathy the root bears love the flower;
> He feels in us, and we in him perceive
> A common passion for the lonely hour.
>
> [Fido]: In all his walks I follow at his side,
> His faithful servant and his loving shade;
>
> [Moppet and Poppet]:

> We move in our apartness and our pride
> About the decent dwellings he has made.

At the end of the opera, Paul leaves the camp because he is no longer needed: the trees have been cut down and America is becoming civilized. In the last scene of the opera (Number 27, Litany), Paul says farewell to the camp at their Christmas party. Fido, Moppet and Poppet sing a list of social evils (some serious and some comic) from which both animals and men in this new country need to be saved. These include pressure groups who undermine the Constitution, intolerance, persecution, alcoholism, "children brought up to believe in self-expression," and "the theology of plumbers and the medical profession."[27]

Auden wrote about household mice in a poem called "Talking to Mice," in 1971, two years before he died. Presumably this was based on an actual situation with mice in the Auden-Kallman household. In this poem he characterized the mouse as "among the most comely of all the miniature mammals who impinge on our lives." Auden makes fun of our tendency to label creatures as good or bad:

> But those animates which we call in our arrogance
> dumb are

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[27]W. H. Auden and Benjamin Britten, Paul Bunyan, VCD 7 90710, Virgin Classics, 1988, libretto.

judged as a species and classed by the melodramatic division,
either Goodies or Beauts.[28]

Auden, who set traps for the mice when they became too prolific, drew an interesting parallel between human-animal relations and politics:

. . . We had felt no talent to murder,
it was against our pluck. Why, why then? For raisons d'Etat. As
householders we had behaved exactly as every State does,
when there is something It wants, and a minor one gets in the way.[29]

In June 1973, just a few months before his death, Auden wrote an affectionate "Address to the Beasts." In this poem he praises the animals for their unaffected nature:

Instinct is commonly said
To rule you: I would call it
Common Sense.

If you cannot engender
a genius like Mozart,
neither can you

plague the earth
with brilliant sillies like Hegel
or clever nasties like Hobbes.[30]

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[28]Auden, Collected Poems, 651.

[29]Auden, Collected Poems, 652.

[30]Auden, Collected Poems, 661.

He contrasts the animals, who "promptly and ably . . . execute Nature's policies",[31] with humankind,

> who seldom know exactly
> what we are up to,
> and, as a rule, don't want to.[32]

Animals, unlike man, never kill senselessly or for sport. Paradoxically, this makes them more "civilized" than we are:

> Of course, you have to take lives
> to keep your own, but never
> kill for applause.[33]

Echoing the Prologue to Our Hunting Fathers of many years before ("Their finish has inspired the limits of all arts and ascetic movements"), he praised the animals for inspiring mankind to artistic achievements:

> Exempt from taxation,
> you have never felt the need
> to become literate,
>
> but your oral cultures
> have inspired our poets to pen
> dulcet verses.[34]

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[31]Auden, Collected Poems, 660.

[32]Auden, Collected Poems, 660.

[33]Auden, Collected Poems, 661.

[34]Auden, Collected Poems, 661.

Prologue

The text to the "Prologue" is as follows:

> They are our past and our future; the poles between which our desire unceasingly is discharged.
> A desire in which love and hatred so perfectly oppose themselves, that we cannot voluntarily move, but await the extraordinary compulsion of the deluge and the earthquake.
> Their finish has inspired the limits of all arts and ascetic movements.
> Their affections and indifferences have been a guide to all reformers and tyrants.
> Their appearances in our dreams of machinery have brought a vision of nude and fabulous epochs.
> O pride so hostile to our charity.
> But what their pride has retained we may by charity more generously recover.

Auden wrote the Prologue expressly for the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers in February 1936.[35] It was reprinted in Another Time, a collection of Auden's poems published in 1940,[36] under the new title "The Creatures."[37]

The text of the Prologue, like many poems by Auden, consists of a string of pithy, intellectual images and

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[35]Edward Mendelson, Early Auden (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 191.

[36]W.H. Auden, Another Time (New York: Random House, 1940). Bibliographic information on this and other collections of Auden's poetry through 1955 may be found in B. C. Bloomfield, W. H. Auden: A Bibliography: The Early Years through 1955 (Charlottesville, Virginia; The University Press of Virginia, 1964).

[37]Stan Smith, W. H. Auden (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 76.

ideas. The subject of the poem, "they," is never expressly named in the text; hence the comment by the music critic at the premiere of Our Hunting Fathers that Auden's poetry sounded like clues to a crossword puzzle.

The first sentence of this poem reads, "They are our past and our future; the poles between which our desire unceasingly is discharged." The desire which "they" awaken in us is ambivalent, composed of the forces of love and hate together. Because of the split nature of this desire, we feel paralyzed and await a cataclysmic event to free us, either by sea (the deluge) or by land (the earthquake). The feeling of duality is conveyed by the use of pairs of contrasting words: "past" and "future," "love" and "hatred," "deluge" and "earthquake."

In three sentences, Auden describes three ways in which "they" have affected the course of human history. He continues to use pairs of contrasting or opposing words and phrases: "arts and ascetic movements," "affections and indifferences," "reformers and tyrants," "dreams of machinery . . . visions of nude and fabulous epochs."

Suddenly appears the exclamation, "O pride so hostile to our charity," in which two contrasting emotions are opposed, echoing the juxtaposition of "past"and "future" at the beginning of the poem and also of "love and hatred." In the last sentence, Auden makes the decision that, although "they" have contributed to our

development in valuable ways, our charity is preferable to their pride.

In The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island, Monroe K. Spears writes:

> The prologue, called "The Creatures" in Collected Poetry, is in prose, somewhat oracular and riddling, but providing in each sentence an image or theme which can be rendered in musical terms.[38]

Several writers have analyzed this poem, which has a reputation as being difficult to understand. Some of these analyses are as recondite as the poem itself.

Although this poem was written to serve as a prologue to a song cycle about animals, Stan Smith in W. H. Auden does not view the creatures as actual animals, but as amoral impulses of our subconscious. He states that the creatures are "recognizably the creatures of the night of the Freud elegy."[39] The poem to which he refers is "In Memory of Sigmund Freud (d. Sept. 1939)," which was written in November, 1939, after "The Creatures." This poem contains the lines:

> but he [Freud] would have us remember most of all
> to be enthusiastic over the night,

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[38]Monroe K. Spears, The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 115-16.

[39]Smith, 76.

> not only for the sense of wonder
> it alone has to offer, but also
>
> because it needs our love. With large sad eyes
> its delectable creatures look up and beg
> us dumbly to ask them to follow:
> they are exiles who long for the future
>
> that lies in our power, they too would rejoice
> if allowed to serve enlightenment like him [Freud],
> even to bear our cry of "Judas",
> as he did and all must bear who serve it.[40]

These creatures of the night, says Smith, are "our past and our future; the poles between/which our desire unceasingly is discharged." This desire, says Smith,

> cannot be broken without confessing all the contradictory feelings hinted at in its language of opposition, antithesis and paradox. Here such a discharge of desire can be effected only by some catastrophic interruption of an inertia in which "love and hatred so perfectly oppose themselves that we cannot voluntarily move, but await the [extraordinary] compulsion of the deluge and the earthquake."[41]

According to Smith, the creatures of our unconscious, our desires, can wreak havoc if we suppress and deny them, but can work for us if we acknowledge and accept them. They can serve the "tyrants" (the fascists

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[40]Auden, Collected Poems, 215-18.

[41]Smith, 77.

of the 1920s and 1930s, who knew how to manipulate the people's desires) or the "reformers." Smith writes:

> How we respond to these excluded, "the injured," who "lead the ugly life of the rejected," whether we acknowledge them as our own or continue to deny them, will determine whether we can overcome evil or not. For seen in the right way, evil is not "deeds that must be punished, but our lack of faith,/our dishonest mood of denial,/the concupiscence of the oppressor."[42]

The deluge spoken of in "The Creatures," says Smith, was a recurrent theme in leftist writing of the 1930s, when writers feared that another war would put an end to the culture that they knew.[43] In February and March of 1934, the Group Theatre produced a play entitled The Deluge in a double bill with Auden's Dance of Death. The Deluge was a play about Noah and the flood from the medieval Chester cycle. Auden adapted some of the medieval English of the original so that it could be better understood by the audience. Later in the spring, Auden organized a performance of The Deluge at the Downs School, where he was teaching.[44]

According to Stephen Spender in his critical study The Destructive Element, written in 1935, the deluge

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[42]Smith, 80. The quotes are from "In Memory of Sigmund Freud," from Auden, Collected Poems, 215-18.

[43]Smith, 77.

[44]Carpenter, Auden, 167-68.

symbolized "both social revolution and the collective unconscious." The title of this essay was taken from a quotation from Joseph Conrad's novel Lord Jim: "In the destructive element immerse. That is the way." In his essay, Spender advocates embracing the destructive tendencies of the coming age. These powers are ultimately linked with the regenerative powers of the unconscious. Spender cited the ending of Auden's poem "1929" as proof that Auden's poetry was "the literature of 'the destructive element,'" defining "a void between two worlds."[45] The final section of "1929" was written in October 1929, at a time when Auden was beginning to gain more of a political consciousness than he had previously possessed. This section begins with the line: "It is time for the destruction of error." Auden proceeds to evoke a vision of death as a prelude to rebirth. "The old gang" probably refers to the group of writers, friends and disciples of Auden's, who shared his literary and political views, called "The Gang."

> This is the dragon's day, the devourer's:
> Orders are given to the enemy for a time . . .
> To haunt the poisoned in his shunned house,
> To destroy the efflorescence of the flesh . . .
>
> We know it, know that love
> Needs more than the admiring excitement of union,
> more than the abrupt self-confident farewell,
> The heel on the finishing blade of grass,

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[45]Smith, 76-78.

> The self-confidence of the falling root,
> Needs death, death of the grain, our death,
> Death of the old gang; would leave them
> In sullen valley where is made no friend,
> The old gang to be forgotten in the spring,
> The hard bitch and the riding-master,
> Stiff underground; deep in clear lake
> The lolling bridegroom, beautiful, there.[46]

According to Smith, it is the creatures of our unconscious which "offer a utopian vision of a world beyond repression, 'nude and fabulous epochs.'" This world can only be recovered by charity and generosity.[47]

In Early Auden, Edward Mendelson writes that in this poem Auden is adapting Schiller's essay Uber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung. In this essay, Schiller states that natural objects such as flowers, streams, and birds "are what we should once again become. We were nature just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature." Whereas Schiller believes that reason and freedom can lead us back to the wholeness of nature, Auden believes instead that this must be accomplished by charity. Mendelson believes, however, that Auden's "hope that charity might accomplish it instead [of reason and freedom] is still only tentative." Mendelson believes that "the [word

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[46]Auden, Collected Poems, 53.

[47]Smith, 77-78.

'charity's'] resonances are still only potentially religious" in Auden's writing. He contrasts the line first written in 1934 for the unpublished play The Chase and also used by Auden in 1935 in The Dog Beneath the Skin: "Choose . . . that you may recover both your charity and your place." Mendelson writes:

> Here, in a vaguely Marxist homily, charity is the object to be recovered, and we have only to choose in order to regain it. In "The Creatures" and afterward it is the means of recovery, and far more difficult to find.[48]

Unlike Smith, Mendelson believes that "in Auden's poem it is the animals, not any political systems, that 'are our past and our future: the poles between which our desire unceasingly is discharged.'" The creatures are solid poles, and mankind is "the spark gap, . . . the electrically charged emptiness between, a place of unceasing discontent and desire." This "middle realm," according to Mendelson, constituting fallen man, "is so divided against itself that resolution on its own terms is impossible." The animals represent not one unified realm, but two unified realms: the past and the future. The past is a view of Eden, and the future of Utopia.

> This double image allows the creatures to take their place in Auden's pattern, where they embody both our wish for a lost arcadian innocence -

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[48]Mendelson, Early Auden, 192-93.

> "Their appearances amid our dreams of machinery have brought a vision of nude and fabulous epochs"
>
> - and our wish for a new utopian order -
>
> "Their affections and indifferences have been a guide to all reformers and tyrants."[49]

Whereas the creatures are "finished (complete in their development)," mankind is divided in its desires and "cannot voluntarily move," but awaits "the deluge or the earthquake" to effect a change. According to Mendelson, however, this extraordinary event does not happen. Instead, we must rely on Charity, "which is neither desire nor compulsion, [to] resolve our bafflement and division, and bring us the wholeness the creatures never lost." This is the meaning of the final lines: "But what their pride has retained, we may by charity more generously recover."[50]

John Wells Jennings in his dissertation The Influence of W. H. Auden on Benjamin Britten interprets the "they" of the first line of "The Creatures" as being the eponymous hunting fathers of the song cycle.

> How paradoxical it is, and frustratingly so, that those fathers of the past are still a

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[49]Mendelson, Early Auden, 191-92.

[50]Mendelson, Early Auden, 191-92.

> necessity to our future. Our love for them as forefathers is tarnished by our hatred for our impotence in directing our own future without their presence. Although we remember their accomplishments with nostalgia and respect, unquestionably they made mistakes. The exploitation of their shortcomings and frailties have benefited both the forces of good and the forces of evil in our present society.[51]

Jennings mentions the polarities set up in the poem, believing that they are between introversion and extroversion and between contrasting societal objectives. He writes that Auden's lines about machinery depict industrial development at the expense of individualism. He maintains that the pride referred to in the poem is our own and that our charity will save us from it.[52]

The musicologist Barbara Docherty, in an article in Tempo magazine, commented on Our Hunting Fathers, contrasting it with Britten's Death in Venice. She sees the "poles between which our desire unceasingly is discharged" as action and contemplation, passion and reason, feeling and thinking, or Dionysus and Apollo. The animals, she says, represent action, passion, and Dionysian characteristics. They are incapable of reason. On the other hand, humans possess the capacity for

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[51]John Wells Jennings, The Influence of W. H. Auden on Benjamin Britten (D. M.A. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1979), 40-41.

[52]Jennings, 41.

contemplation and rational thinking. When humans exercise this capacity to excess, however, they may find themselves cut off from their passionate, instinctual nature and thus suffer a lack of emotional fulfillment.[53] Docherty cites Thomas Mann, author of the story "Death in Venice," who points out that "the more elevated the nature, the more certainly does this doubleness and schism run through its heart."[54] Aschenbach, the hero of Thomas Mann's novella, "Death in Venice," which Britten set to music as his last opera, is an example of just such an elevated nature. Aschenbach "has reason in abundance," but hungers for "that 'perilous sweetness' when imagination is no longer servant of the will.'"[55] In Our Hunting Fathers, the animals serve partly as an analogy for the emotional, instinctual component of man's psyche which Aschenbach seeks to recover in Death in Venice.[56]

Auden himself was concerned about the dual nature of man. In 1939 Auden wrote that he objected to dualisms

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[53]Barbara Docherty, "Aschenbach's Wilderness," Tempo 157 (June 1986): 9-10.

[54]Thomas Mann, "Richard Wagner and the Ring," in Essays of Three Decades (1947); quoted in Docherty, 10.

[55]Docherty, 10. The quote "perilous sweetness" is from the libretto of Benjamin Britten's opera, Death in Venice (vocal score), 158.

[56]Docherty, 9-10.

such as those between body and soul, energy and matter, God and Satan, state and individual, bourgeoisie and proletariat: "There are not 'good' and 'evil' existences," he wrote. "Everything that is holy . . . Evil is not an existence but a state of disharmony between existences."[57] Auden believed that the difficult relationship between him and his mother had led to a psychic split in his nature. He wrote a poem about this:

> Tommy did as mother told him
> Till his soul had split;
> One half thought of angels
> And the other half of shit.[58]

Auden was of the opinion that his mother encouraged his mental development at the expense of his physical development, and that was why he became physically clumsy. He was aware that in himself the Jungian qualities of thinking and intuiting were more highly developed than the qualities of sensing and feeling. He wrote that "I must have knowledge and a great deal of it before I can feel anything."[59] This characterization of himself could have applied equally well to Aschenbach.

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[57]Carpenter, Auden, 269.

[58]Carpenter, Auden, 11.

[59]Osborne, 204.

In the sonnet sequence In Time of War, written in 1938, Auden was to speak of man's plight in a phrase which echoed a line from the Prologue to Our Hunting Fathers. In this series of poems, he called humans "a race of promise that has never proved its worth"[60] and which yearns vainly for "the warm nude ages of instinctive poise."[61]

In 1941, Auden published a book of poems called The Double Man, which explored man's dual nature. In a note to the poem "New Year Letter" from this volume, Auden discussed the psychic split in man, contrasting it with the state of the animals, whose consciousness was more unified:

> To do evil is to act contrary to self-interest. It is possible for all living creatures to do this because their knowledge of their self-interest is false or inadequate. Thus the animals whose evolution is complete, whose knowledge of their relations to the rest of creation is fixed, can do evil, but they cannot sin.
>
> But we, being divided, remembering, evolving beings composed of a number of "selves," each with its false conception of its self-interest, sin in most that we do, for we can rarely act in such a way that the false self-interests of all our different "selves" are satisfied. The majority of our actions are in the false interest of one of those selves, not always the same one, at the expense of the rest. The consciousness that we are acting contrary to the interest of the others is our consciousness of sin. That is why, when we

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[60]Auden, "In Time of War," in Selected Poems, 71.

[61]Auden, "In Time of War," in Selected Poems, 78.

> look at history and men, we always find evidence of guilt, but the objects and actions about which it is felt vary so widely that the only generalization we can make with certainty is of the universality of guilt, i.e., that conceptions of self-interest vary but are always false.
>
> For, if our different "selves" had true self-knowledge of their respective self-interests, it would be impossible for us to act except in a way that satisfied them all, and we should each become not only an undivided consciousness and therefore, like the animals, unable to sin, but also an undivided consciousness with a true knowledge of itself, and therefore unable to do evil.[62]

In Part III of "New Year Letter," Auden bemoaned the alienation of man from nature in industrial societies, which helped to cause the psychic split within man himself. In this section of the poem, Auden writes of "mechanized societies/Where natural intuition dies."[63] The denial of one's natural instincts can lead to destructiveness and violence:

> This lust in action to destroy
> Is not the pure instinctive joy
> Of animals, but the refined
> Creation of machines and mind.[64]

Auden's ambivalent attitude toward machines and his interest in the conflict between man and nature are

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[62]Auden, Note to line 607 of "New Year Letter," in The Double Man, 107.

[63]Auden, "New Year Letter," in The Double Man, 49.

[64]Auden, "New Year Letter," in The Double Man, 48-49.

evinced in the lines of the Prologue, "Their appearances in our dreams of machinery have brought a vision of nude and fabulous epochs."[65]

Auden was aware of the potential of machines to hurt as well as to help man. In April, 1933, he wrote an article entitled "How to Be Masters of the Machine" in which he warned of the need to "have enough self-knowledge and common sense to ensure that machines are employed by your needs, and not your needs by the machinery."[66]

Sensible as this may sound, Auden's interest in machinery, factories and mining was more romantic than practical. When he was very young, his parents often took him to the gasworks, because they believed that the fumes could help his bronchial trouble. He was awed by what he saw there.[67] The Auden family often went to visit local factories and places with machinery.[68] Later, Auden was to write of:

> Those beautiful machines that never talked
> But let the small boy worship them and learn

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[65]Humphrey Carpenter (Auden, 158) writes that by 1933 "the dream was already one of Auden's favourite devices in his poetry."

[66]Auden, "How to Be Masters of the Machine," in The English Auden, 317; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 151.

[67]Carpenter, Auden, 5.

[68]Carpenter, Auden, 12-13.

> All their long names whose hardness made him proud.[69]

Humphrey Carpenter writes that "it was not so much that he wanted to understand machinery and to know how it worked; rather that he wanted to love it and make it part of his private imaginative world."[70]

At Oxford, Auden's favorite walk was to go by the gasworks and municipal rubbish dump. Charles Osborne, one of Auden's biographers, writes:

> he was not really interested in nature unless nature was at work reclaiming old mines or derelict machinery. It was the evidence of man in nature that intrigued him. . . Wystan was quite fond of canals and waterways, it seemed, as long as they were overgrown or neglected, but he was completely unmoved by rare or beautiful flora or fauna.[71]

Since Auden titled this poem "The Creatures" and wrote it expressly to serve as the prologue to a cycle about animals, he probably meant it to refer literally to these animals. At the same time, he considered the animals to possess certain instinctual characteristics

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[69] Auden, Collected Poems, 203; quoted in Carpenter, Auden, 13.

[70] Carpenter, Auden

[71] Osborne, 36-37.

which humans possessed but in many instances had suppressed. In that capacity, the animals indeed could symbolize certain unconscious, bestial drives, or Smith's "creatures of the unconscious."

In this poem, man is confronted with the animals, which produce in him ambivalent feelings and an inability to act. Although he recognizes the animals' limitations, he realizes that they touch a chord within him, the chord of his instinctual nature which has been repressed by civilization. This instinctual nature cannot be silenced completely, however. It has been at work in man's "arts and ascetic movements" and has affected the actions of "all reformers and tyrants." It has appeared in his "dreams of machinery," bringing "a vision of nude and fabulous epochs." Animals are instinctual and proud, however. In order for humans to survive as a race, they must modify these characteristics with charity, a more civilized and Christian emotion. In other words, to quote a famous poem of Auden's from the same period, "September 1, 1939," "we must love one another or die."[72]

Rats Away!

The text of "Rats Away!" is as follows:

I command all the rats that are hereabout
That none dwell in this place, within or without:

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[72]Auden, Selected Poems, 88.

Through the virtue of Jesus that Mary bore,
Whom all creatures must ever adore;
And through the virtue of Mark, Matthew, Luke and John,
All four Archangels that are as one;
Through the virtue of Saint Gertrude, that maid clean,
God grant in grace
That no rats dwell in the place
That these names were uttered in;
And through the virtue of Saint Kasi,
That holy man who prayed to God Almighty
Of the scathes they did
His meadows amid
By day and by night.
God bid them flee and go out of every man's sight.
Dominus, Deus, Sabaoth, Emmanuel, great name of God,
Deliver this place from rats and from all other shame.
God save this place from all other wicked wights,
Both by days and by nights,
Et in Nomine Patris et Filii et Sancti Spiriti,

Amen.

"Rats Away!" is an anonymous medieval poem modernized by W. H. Auden for the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers.[73] Britten wrote to his brother that this poem especially was "very satirical, and likely to cause a good amount of comment."[74] This poem portrays animals as pests. The speaker in the poem is attempting to banish rats from his premises, perhaps a building or a field. He invokes the names of saints and of deities in an effort to drive off the rats. These names, interspersed with the

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[73]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 429.

[74]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 429.

speaker's repeated requests for the rats to be driven away, include Jesus, Mary, the disciples Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, Saints Gertrude and Kasi, and the name of God himself in various forms: Dominus, Deus, Sabaoth, and Emmanuel. The last two lines name the three components of the trinity in Latin: "Et in Nomine Patris et Filii et Sancti Spiriti, /Amen."

In this poem rats are called "wicked wights" (creatures) who bring shame to the place in which they dwell. They are blamed for doing harm in the fields of St. Kasi:

> That holy man who prayed to God Almighty
> Of the scathes they did
> His meadows amid
> By day and by night.

In contrast, the purity and greatness of the saints and of God are stressed. Saint Gertrude is referred to as "that maid clean." Saint Kasi is "that holy man." God is invoked by his "great name." Jesus is praised for his power over all animals. One also remembers that Jesus was well-known for exorcising evil spirits in the Bible.

> Through the virture of Jesus that Mary bore,
> Whom all creatures must ever adore;
> And through the virtue of Mark, Matthew, Luke and
> John,
> All four Archangels that are as one;

Like the Prologue, this poem contains many polarities and contrasts. Those between clean and unclean and between good and evil have already been mentioned. Additional polarities exist between night and day ("God save this place from all other wicked wights,/Both by days and by nights"), male and female (Saints Gertrude and Kasi; Jesus and Mary), and the concepts of trinity ("in Nomine Patris et Filii et Sancti Spiriti") and of quaternity ("Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John").

Rats are "aggressive, active, omnivorous, adaptable, and fecund animals that live with man and have accompanied him almost throughout the world."[75] They are infamous for destroying valuable crops, game, and stored food and for spreading or harboring over twenty diseases.[76] Rats have been despised traditionally in Western culture as unclean; fleas spread the Black Death, or plague, from infected rats to humans in the fourteenth century.[77] About twenty-five million people, or one-third of the population of Europe, died of the plague between 1347 and 1351.[78] Beryl Rowland says that:

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[75]Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1994 ed., s.v. "Rat."

[76]Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1994 ed., s.v. "Rat."

[77]Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1994 ed., s.v. "Plague."

[78]Encyclopaedia Brittanica, 1994 ed., s.v. "Black Death."

> The black or ship rat was not known to the ancient Greeks and Romans and was probably imported into Europe from the Levant by the Crusaders. The brown or common rat is even more recent; on its arrival this rat quickly assumed the current symbolism of the mouse as a supernatural creature. Its nature gave it a reputation as a portent of evil, particularly in dreams, and incantatory charms were used to try to get rid of it - hence the expression "rhyming a rat to death."[79]

Mice, who also were implicated in the spread of the bubonic plague, were associated with death in ancient and medieval Europe.[80] The Greek god Apollo, sometimes invoked as "O Smintheus," ("O Mouse"), was believed to have sent the plague.[81] Mice sometimes symbolized the souls of the dead and were said to be lascivious, since they reproduced rapidly. The mouse became a symbol of female sexual incontinency in particular; in ancient and medieval times, mouse-trap and mouse were slang expressions for the pudendum, and a lascivious woman was referred to as a mousehole.[82] In Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Lady Capulet refers to her husband's former

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[79]Beryl Rowland, Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), 136.

[80]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 136.

[81]Anthony S. Mercatante, Zoo of the Gods: Animals in Myth, Legend, and Fable (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 129.

[82]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 127-28.

amorous exploits: "Ay, you have been a mouse-hunt in your time."[83] Mice were also thought to be thieving and greedy, since they ate men's food. St. Gertrude, who is invoked in this poem, is associated with mice in legend:

> Souls of the departed were believed to spend their first night with St. Gertrude. She performed duties peculiar to mouse gods: she not only averted plagues of mice but punished sinners by sending mice to devastate their fields. Her center was at Nivelles, where a cult of a Teutonic goddess of death flourished in pre-Christian times, and she is still depicted with mice on her distaff and mice swarming around her feet.[84]

Anthony Mercatante, however, groups rats and mice together from an earlier date and says that Gertrude's companions were rats:

> The rat's connection with the soul and death is a prevalent theme in most European mythologies and has been passed on to Christianity. The pagan Germans, for instance, worshiped a goddess called Nehalennia or Hludana, whose symbol was the rat and whose function was to accompany the souls of the dead. In medieval European symbolism the goddess was turned into the twelfth-century St. Gertrude, who was invoked by the living for the souls of the dead. The saint was nearly always pictured with a rat as her companion. One Christian explanation for the symbol is that Gertrude was so absorbed in prayer she did not notice rats running up and down her pastoral staff; another version says the rat,

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[83]William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, ed. J. A. Bryant, Jr. (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 4.4.11.

[84]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 127-29.

being a symbol of evil, was overcome by Gertrude.[85]

Mercatante names mice and rats as symbols of the night. A fable by Aesop relates the story of a lion (symbol of the day) who refrained from killing a mouse (symbol of the night). Later, the grateful mouse, seeing the lion caught in a net, gnawed away at the net and freed the lion. In the E. T. A. Hoffmann story which is the basis for Chaikovski's Nutcracker ballet, the Nutcracker defeats the Mouse King, upon which the heroine is bathed in a brilliant burst of light.[86]

Rowland relates how, in the mid-thirteenth-century book Golden Legend, two rats gnawing at a tree trunk symbolized the erosion of life by night and by day. After that, religious art depicted the transitory nature of life and its pleasures, using a white rat to symbolize day and a black rat to symbolize night.[87]

In modern times, the rat may have lost some of its supernatural significance, but it is still feared and despised. In George Orwell's 1984, the jailor O'Brien of the futuristic totalitarian regime tortures the hero, Winston, with the threat of being attacked by starving

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[85]Mercatante, 129.

[86]Mercatante, 130.

[87]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 136.

rats in a cage. In this horrific scene, O'Brien addresses Winston on the habits of rats:

> "The rat," said O'Brien . . . "although a rodent, is carnivorous. You are aware of that. You will have heard of the things that happen in the poor quarters of this town. In some streets a woman dare not leave her baby alone in the house, even for five minutes. The rats are certain to attack it. Within quite a small time they will strip it to the bones. They also attack sick or dying people. They show astonishing intelligence in knowing when a human being is helpless."[88]

Rats could be said, on a psychological level, to represent man's shadow side. Rats live with man, eat his food and sometimes infect him with disease. They are associated with night, evil, and misfortune. They represent qualities that man despises and wishes to disown: greed, lust, destruction, and the ability to bring death. In this poem, the speaker wishes to disown or banish the rats, and, at least on some level, the negative traits that are associated with them. This action could be said to symbolize "splitting," or "projection," a phenomenon in which those traits which an individual does not wish to recognize in himself are projected onto someone else.[89] Carl Jung's disciple, M.-

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[88]George Orwell [Eric Blair], 1984 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1949), 234-35.

[89]M.-L. von Franz, "The Process of Individuation," in Man and His Symbols (New York, Dell Publishing, 1968), 168-185.

L. von Franz, wrote: "rather than face our defects as revealed by the shadow, we project them on to others - for instance, on to our political enemies."[90]

Although this poem was written well before the twentieth century, Donald Mitchell suggests that, to Britten and Auden, the rats in this poem could have represented the fascists in Italy and Germany who were threatening to take over Europe and put an end to civilization as they had known it.[91] At the same time, it is important to consider that in Nazi Germany Jews were said to be subhuman (Untermenschen) and often were referred to as rats. Nazi leaders compared Jews to rats in propaganda films and literature. Killing of Jews was sometimes called euphemistically Säuberung (cleansing), GroBsäuberungsaktionen (major cleansing or purging actions), or Bereinigung der Judenfrage (cleansing up of the Jewish question). The Nazis often said that the Jews had to be ausgemerzt (exterminated).[92] In his visit to a Nazi killing unit in Minsk, Heinrich Himmler rationalized the murder of the Jews by comparing them to noxious vermin which must be exterminated. Himmler speaks using the same

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[90]von Franz, 181.

[91]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 34.

[92]Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 216.

rigid dichotomy between good and bad, between harmful and noxious, that one finds in "Rats Away!," but now he extends the metaphor to the human race:

> Himmler told the men to look at nature. There was combat everywhere, not only among men but also in the world of animals and plants. Whoever was too tired to fight must go under (zugrunde gehen). The most primitive man says that the horse is good and the bedbug is bad, or wheat is good and the thistle is bad. The human being consequently designates what is useful to him as good and what is harmful as bad. Didn't bedbugs and rats have a life purpose also? Yes, but this has never meant that man could not defend himself against vermin.[93]

Auden himself satirized the view of the Jews as unclean in 1933 in his play Dance of Death when the Dancer and Announcer told the chorus to beat up the manager of the theatre, because he was "a dirty Jew."[94]

Why did the Nazis treat the Jews like subhumans, like "beasts in human form," as Hitler put it?[95] Joachim Fest, author of The Face of the Third Reich, writes that Hitler's prejudice against the Jews and fixation with the superiority of Aryan blood

> can be seen as an expression of his certainty that he too suffered from the "morbidity of corrupted

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[93]Hilberg, 219.

[94]Humphrey Carpenter, W. H. Auden: A Biography (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981), 165.

[95]Otto-Ernst Schuddekopf, Revolutions of Our Time: Fascism (New York: Praeger, 1973), 167.

> blood" and was forever excluded from the "brotherhood of the truly pure and noble." The physical characteristics he persecuted were for the most part easily recognizable in his own face and body, and for his description of the "universal enemy" he drew upon his own personal traits . . . Similarly Hitler's own principles, practices and aims - as he described them himself - were virtually identical with those for which he attacked his opponents, in whom he secretly recognized and hated himself.[96]

When one deals with split-off parts of the self by projecting them onto other people and then committing acts of violence on these people, it becomes "a never-ending task," because there is still "the fear of a possible resurrection and return of the split-off parts of the self."[97]

> behind it hovers fear of the emergence of one's own repressed weakness, humiliation, and helplessness, which one has tried to escape all one's life by means of grandiose behavior.[98]

In a note to "New Year Letter" which was actually a poem in itself, Auden captured the deepest truths about the Nazis' insatiable urge to project their undesirable qualities onto the Jews and then to persecute the Jews as the personification of these qualities:

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[96]Joachim Fest, "The Führer," in The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of the Nazi Leadership, trans. Michael Bullock (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), 30.

[97]Miller, 188.

[98]Miller, 188.

[line] 275 The Jew wrecked in the German cell

How he survived them they could never understand:
Had they not beggared him themselves to prove
They could not live without their dogmas or their land?

No worlds they drove him from were ever big enough:
How could it be the earth the Unconfined
Meant when It bade them set no limits to their love?

And he fulfilled the role for which he was designed:
On heat with fear, he drew their terrors to him,
And was a godsend to the lowest of mankind.

Till there was no place left where they could still pursue him
Except that exile which he called his Race.
But, envying him even that, they plunged right through him

Into a land of mirrors without time or space,
And all they had to strike now was the human face.[99]

As has been mentioned, it was in another note to "New Year Letter" in which Auden said that integration of the different aspects of the personality, presumably including those which comprise the shadow self, would lead to the eradication of evil:

> For, if our different "selves" had true self-knowledge of their respective self-interests, it would be impossible for us to act except in a way that satisfied them all, and we should each become not only an undivided consciousness and therefore, like the animals, unable to sin, but also an

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[99]Auden, Note to line 275 of "New Year Letter," in The Double Man, 90.

> undivided consciousness with a true knowledge of itself, and therefore unable to do evil.[100]

For Auden, to fail to recognize and acknowledge the negative traits within oneself was irresponsible. This even included one's personal share of responsibility for World War II. As we have seen, Auden had hoped to serve in the war with the American forces but was turned down. In a letter to his friend, Stephen Spender, in 1941, Auden wrote:

> I have absolutely no patience with Pacifism as a political movement, as if one could do all the things in one's personal life that create wars and then pretend that to refuse to fight is a sacrifice and not a luxury.[101]

Of course, one's interpretation of this poem depends upon one's point of view. As Britten wrote about "Rats Away!,"

> It has always puzzled me to think what the rats [sic] opinion must be of God (naturally the same God - vide the Bible & sparrows etc.) when being poisoned in the name of the Lord.[102]

Messalina

The text to "Messalina" is as follows:

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[100]Auden, Note to line 607 of "New Year Letter," in The Double Man, 107.

[101]Osborne, 206-7.

[102]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 429.

Ay me, alas, heigh ho, heigh ho!
Thus doth Messalina go
Up and down the house a-crying,
For her monkey lies a-dying.
Death, thou art too cruel
To bereave her of her jewel;
Or to make a seizure
Of her only treasure.
If her monkey die
She will sit and cry:
Fie, fie, fie, fie, fie!

"Messalina" is an anonymous poem which had been set to music by Thomas Weelkes in his 1608 collection of Airs or Fantastic Spirits to Three Voices, where it was called by its first line, "Ay Me, Alas, Hey Ho."[103] The editor of the 1916 collection, The English Madrigal School, Edmund Horace Fellowes, writes of the poems in this volume of Weelkes's: "the words are of a light character, and some of them have had a political or topical meaning, the explanation of which has been lost."[104] Auden found the poem in Fellowes's collection English Madrigal Verse 1588-1632.[105] It was also in this book that he found Thomas Ravenscroft's "Hawking for the Partridge," which Auden renamed "Dance of Death," the poem for the fourth song of

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[103]Thomas Weelkes, Airs or Fantastic Spirits to Three Voices, in The English Madrigal School, ed. Edmund Horace Fellowes, vol. 13 (London: Stainer and Bell, 1916).

[104]Fellowes, introduction, Airs or Fantastic Spirits.

[105]Edmund Horace Fellowes, English Madrigal Verse 1588-1632 (London: Oxford University Press, 1920), 227.

Our Hunting Fathers.[106] He later included both of these poems in his own collection, The Oxford Book of Light Verse, which he assembled in 1938.[107] Even though Auden included these two poems in an anthology of light verse, that does not necessarily mean that he did not take their sentiment seriously or that he thought they had little artistic value. In the introduction to his anthology, Auden explained that by "light verse" he meant:

> (1) Poetry written for performance, to be spoken or sung before an audience [e.g. Folk-songs, the poems of Tom Moore].
> (2) Poetry intended to be read, but having for its subject-matter the everyday social life of its period or the experiences of the poet as an ordinary human being [e.g. the poems of Chaucer, Pope, Byron].
> (3) Such nonsense poetry as, through its properties and technique, has a general appeal [Nursery rhymes, the poems of Edward Lear].[108]

Auden goes on to say that "light verse can be serious."

> It has only come to mean vers de société, triolets, smoke-room limericks, because, under the social conditions which produced the Romantic Revival, and which have persisted, more or less, ever since, it has been only in trivial matters that poets have felt in sufficient intimacy with

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[106]Fellowes, English Madrigal Verse 1588-1632, 185.

[107]W.H. Auden, ed., The Oxford Book of Light Verse (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), 118-20.

[108]Auden, Oxford Book of Light Verse, ix.

> their audience to be able to forget themselves and their singing-robes.[109]

Auden renamed this poem "Messalina" for the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers. "Messalina" is the shortest poem of the cycle: it is only eleven lines long. There are five pairs of rhyming lines plus the word "fie" given five times at the end as the final line.

Messalina is the owner of a pet monkey. She is crying because the monkey is near death. The first line of the poem contains Messalina's cry, "Ay me, alas, heigh ho." In lines two through four, the poet paints the picture of Messalina pacing up and down the house in grief. The rhyming words "a-crying" and "a-dying" appear at the end of lines three and four. The feminine endings of these words sound like sighs of helplessness and despair. These words also echo the mournful sound "ay" from the first line. In lines five through eight, the narrator rebukes Death for robbing Messalina of her monkey. The violent words "cruel" and "seizure" are rhymed with the descriptions of the monkey as "her jewel" and "her only treasure," descriptions that sound more appropriate to a lover than to a pet. Lines nine, ten, and eleven end with "die," "cry," and "fie," respectively. These words, like "a-crying" at the end of line three and

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[109]Auden, Oxford Book of Light Verse, ix-x.

"a-dying" at the end of line four repeat the "ay" sound of the first line of the poem, although the endings of the last three lines are masculine instead of feminine. The final line, which contains the word "fie," is a mirror to the expression of grief, "Ay me, alas, heigh ho, heigh ho!" in the first line of the poem. The word "fie," however, begins with the energetic consonant "f," is monosyllabic, and has a masculine ending like "die" and "cry" of the previous two lines: it therefore sounds harsher and more direct. Thus Messalina's grief has become more bitter and more pungent.

In his discussion of Britten's highly passionate musical setting of this poem, Donald Mitchell wrote:

> . . . the hugeness of Messalina's grief at the loss of her monkey, so overwhelming, so passionate a torrent of grieving - was there not something faintly unseemly about this disproportion? This storm of sorrow - over a monkey? Once again, the music . . . - by converting the sentiment of the poem into a torrential paroxysm of grief - adds a wholly new dimension to the text: the shock of it should shake one into a new perception of what men and animals might mean to each other.[110]

A study of the historical personage Messalina and of the traditional characteristics assigned to apes in western society, however, reveal new levels of meaning in the text itself which might make Britten's musical setting appear less shocking, even though one cannot be sure how

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[110]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 41.

much of this information was known to Britten, at least on a conscious level.

In writing this poem, the author may have been referring to Valeria Messalina, the third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius. Claudius, born in 10 BC, was the uncle of Caligula and succeeded him as emperor when Caligula was assassinated in AD 41. Claudius was chronically ill and possessed "an uncouthness approaching deformity."[111] Claudius married Messalina in AD 39 or 40, when she was nineteen or twenty. Messalina enjoyed the honors, luxury, and magnificent parties which came with her position. She also craved sexual satisfaction, which the older, unattractive Claudius was probably unable to give her. She was notorious for her sexual exploits. The historian Michael Grant writes, "if only one-tenth of the stories which have made Messalina a byword for lasciviousness are true, she was phenomenally oversexed."[112] In his Satires, Juvenal writes about her in extremely insulting terms:

> Hear what Claudius
> Had to put up with. The minute she heard him snoring,
> His wife - that whore-empress - who dared to prefer the mattress

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[111]Michael Grant, The Twelve Caesars (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 126.

[112]Grant, 144-45.

> Of a stews to her couch in the Palace, called for her hooded
> Night-cloak and hastened forth, alone or with a single
> Maid to attend her. Then, her black hair hidden
> Under an ash-blonde wig, she would make straight for her brothel
> With its odour of stale, warm bedclothes, its empty reserved cell.
> Here she would strip off, showing her gilded nipples and the belly that once housed a prince of the blood.[113]

In AD 48, while Claudius was away in Ostia to supervise the building of a port of Rome there, Messalina attempted to seize power. She renounced the emperor and married her lover Gaius Silius, a young consul designate who was extremely good-looking, in a bacchanalian wedding ceremony. Part of Messalina's purpose in so doing was to set herself and Silius up as regents until her seven-year-old son Britannicus would be old enough to rule Rome. When Claudius came back to Rome, he was dismayed and unable to cope with the situation. His secretary Narcissus took control. Narcissus had Silius arrested and executed.[114]

Messalina reacted hysterically to the situation, as did Messalina in the poem to the death of her monkey. The

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[113]Juvenal, Satires, vol. 6, trans. P. Green, 115ff; quoted in Grant, 145.

[114]Grant, 145-46.

Roman historian Tacitus described the scene vividly:

> So Narcissus hurried away. Ostensibly on the emperor's instruction, he ordered a colonel of the Guard, attended by staff-officers, to kill Messalina. An ex-slave was sent to prevent her escape and see that the order was carried out. Hastening to the Gardens ahead of the others, he found Messalina prostrate on the ground, with her mother Domitia Lepida sitting beside her. While her daughter was in power they had quarrelled. But in her extremity, Lepida was overcome by pity. She urged Messalina to await the executioner. "Your life is finished," she said. "It only remains to die honourably." But in that lust-ridden heart decency did not exist. Messalina was still uselessly weeping and moaning when the men violently broke down the door. The officer stood there, silently. The ex-slave, with a slave's foulness of tongue, insulted her. Then, for the first time, Messalina saw her position. Terrified, she took a dagger and put it to her throat and then her breast - but could not do it. The officer ran her through. The body was left with her mother. Claudius was still at table when news came that Messalina had died; whether by her own hand or another's was unspecified. Claudius did not inquire. He called for more wine, and went on with his party as usual.[115]

Could the monkey of this poem represent Messalina's lover Silius, at least on one level? Of all the animals mentioned in this song cycle, the monkey is the closest to humans in its appearance and habits and is the most closely related to them on the evolutionary scale. This makes it the most likely candidate for projection of human characteristics. The adjective "simian" comes from the

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[115]Tacitus, "Claudius and His Wives," in From Augustus to Nero: The First Dynasty of Imperial Rome, ed. Ronald Mellor (East Lansing, Michigan: Michigan State University Press, 1990), 304-5.

Latin simia, which is also the root for the word similitude. This, according to Bartholomaeus Anglicus, was because "in many thynges [the ape] counterfeteth the dedes of men."[116] When Darwin's On the Origin of Species was published in 1859, establishing the close evolutionary relationship between men and apes, a cartoon was published showing an ape being introduced as a relative.[117]

In India, Egypt, and China, these animals were respected and revered. When apes died in Egypt, they were embalmed as if they had been people.[118]

In Western culture, however, the monkey and ape were looked upon with less favor. The ape was generally believed to counterfeit or mirror man's less admirable deeds and qualities.[119] A nineteenth-century American clergyman wrote:

> Do Apes disgust, because the look and shape
> Bear such resemblance to the human form,
> While in the actions they are still the Ape,
> So wild and brutal, that they cannot charm?

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[116]John Trevisa, Trevisa's Englishing of Bartholomaeus de proprietatibus rerum, libri. XVIII (London, 1495); quoted in Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 8.

[117]Mercatante, 43.

[118]Mercatante, 41-42.

[119]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 8.

The implied answer was, "yes." The preacher goes on to equate apes with men who are ruled by their bestial natures:

> Ye bigger apes of human name and dress,
> Loose, foppish, vain, in manner much the same,
> Your near alliance to the Ape confess,
> Till worthier deeds shall prove a higher claim.[120]

Apes were associated with evil and misfortune. It was considered an ill omen to meet an ape when leaving home or to dream of an ape. The second-century dream expert Artemidorus Daldianus said that if one dreamt of an ape, this portended sickness or misfortune. In "The Nun's Priest's Tale" in The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer alludes to this superstition when he has a character say that men are always dreaming of owls and apes, that is, always giving credence to evil portents.[121]

The ape has often been equated with the devil in western culture. There was a belief that an ape offered Eve the apple in the Garden of Eden. Many medieval works of art showed an ape "munching an apple or squatting vilely by the tree of knowledge."[122]

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[120]Mercatante, 43.

[121]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 8.

[122]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 12.

In Western culture, apes, like the empress Messalina, have had a reputation for lasciviousness. In the Romance countries during the Middle Ages, the word for the female ape, guenon, or singesse, also came to mean "prostitute." A medieval proverb said that a wanton widow was like "a dyvell in the kyttchine and a nape in her bedde."[123] In Shakespeare's Othello, Iago falsely accuses Desdemona of betraying Othello with Cassio, saying "they are as prime [lustful] as goats, as hot as monkeys."[124] In the same play, Cassio speaks of a woman who wants to marry him first as a "customer" (prostitute), then as a "monkey," once again linking this animal with lustfulness.[125]

Monkeys were common pets for ladies in Shakespeare's time.[126] There even have been stories connecting human females with male monkeys sexually. Rousseau referred to stories of apes pursuing women in his

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[123]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 8.

[124]William Shakespeare, Othello, ed. Alvin Kernan, Signet Classic Shakespeare Series (New York: New American Library, 1963), 3.3.400.

[125]Shakespeare, Othello, 4.1.121, 129.

[126]H. W. Seager, Natural History in Shakespeare's Time: Being Extracts Illustrative of the Subject As He Knew It (London, 1896; reprinted New York: AMS Press, 1971), 205.

Second Discourse.[127] In Candide by Voltaire, the hero shoots and kills two monkeys who are pursuing two women. Much to his amazement,

> he saw the girls lovingly embrace the monkeys, burst into tears over their bodies and fill the air with grief-stricken cries.
>
> "I wasn't expecting such tender compassion," he said at length to Cacambo [his servant].
>
> "That was a fine thing to do, sir!" said Cacambo. "You've killed those young ladies' lovers!"
>
> "Their lovers? Impossible! You're joking, Cacambo! How could I believe such a thing?"
>
> "My dear master," replied Cacambo, "you're always surprised by everything. Why do you find it so strange that in some countries there should be monkeys that enjoy the favors of ladies? They're a quarter human, just as I'm a quarter Spanish."[128]

In Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew, Katherina complains that she will have to "lead apes in hell."[129] In Much Ado about Nothing, Beatrice says that she will "take sixpence in earnest [advance payment] of the berrord

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[127]Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Euvres Complètes, I (Paris: Dalbon, 1826), 367ff; cited in Hester Hastings, Man and Beast in French Thought of the Eighteenth Century, The Johns Hopkins Studies in Romance Literatures and Languages Series (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1936), 120.

[128]Voltaire [Francois-Marie Arouet], Candide, trans. Lowell Bair (New York: Bantam, 1959; reprinted 1981), 59-60.

[129]Shakespeare, The Taming of the Shrew, ed. Robert B. Heilman, The Signet Classic Shakespeare (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 2.1.34.

[animal keeper] and lead his apes into hell."[130] These two ladies were referring to the belief that women who die unmarried will be condemned to this fate. Rowland writes that the underlying fear in this superstition was that "the woman who refuses to mate on earth will be condemned to couple with apes in hell."[131] She cites William Corkine's verse in his Second Book of Airs (1612), which runs:

> Away, away! call back what you have said
> When you did vow to live and die a maid.
> O if you knew what chance to them befell
> That dance about with bobtail apes in hell,
> Yourself your virgin girdle would divide
> And put aside the maiden veil that hides
> The chiefest gem of nature: and would lie
> Prostrate to every peasant that goes by,
> Rather than undergo such shame; no tongue can tell
> What injury is done to maids in hell.[132]

The implication may be that if a woman represses her sexuality, it will reassert itself later in an unpleasant way.

In the poem, Messalina loves her monkey very much. Monkeys, like human beings, are known to crave love and

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[130]William Shakespeare, Much Ado about Nothing, ed. David L. Stevenson, The Signet Classic Shakespeare Series (New York: New American Library, 1964), 2.1.40-41.

[131]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 9.

[132]Rowland, Animals with Human Faces, 9.

affection. In one of Aesop's fables, a monkey gives birth to two babies. She ignores one but caresses the other so much that she smothers it. The moral of the story is: "Too much love kills the thing it loves."[133]
In studies conducted at the University of Wisconsin by scientist Harry Harlow, infant monkeys were given a choice between love (in the form of an artificial surrogate mother made of terry-cloth) and food. The scientists were surprised to see that the monkeys chose love. Harlow wrote, "Man cannot live by milk alone. Love is an emotion that does not need to be bottle- or spoon-fed."[134]

The similarity of monkeys to people, Messalina's and the monkey's reputation for lasciviousness in Western culture, the monkey's affectionate nature, and the folklore linking female humans with male monkeys sexually all suggest a dimension of this poem that goes beyond that of an owner grieving for a pet. This hidden meaning remains ambiguous, however. If there originally was a political or topical meaning to the poem, it has since been lost. The monkey might suggest a human lover, or a human child, or the animal aspect of Messalina's

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[133]Mercatante, 44.

[134]Robert M. Sapolsky, Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: A Guide to Stress, Stress-Related Diseases, and Coping, The Portable Stanford Book Series (New York: W. H. Freeman, 1994), 103-5.

personality. Or, if one takes the poem literally, it is with the realization of how closely the species of monkeys and homo sapiens are related.

Dance of Death

The text to "Dance of Death" is as follows:

Whurret! Duty Beauty
Quando Timble
Travel Trover
Jew Damsel
Hey dogs hey! Ware haunt hey!

Sith sickles and the shearing scythe
Hath shorn the fields of late,
Now shall our hawks and we be blithe,
Dame Partridge ware your pate!
Our murdering kites
In all their flights
Will seld or never miss
To truss you ever and make your bale our bliss.

Whurret! Wanton Sugar Mistress
Sempster Faver Minx
Callis Dover Sant
Dancer Jerker Quoy

Whurret! Tricker Crafty Minion
Dido Civil Lemmon
Cherry Carver Courtier
Stately Ruler German let fly!

O well flown, eager kite, mark!
We falconers thus make sullen kites
Yield pleasure fit for kings,
And sport with them in those delights,
And oft in other things.

The third of the inner poems of the cycle representing aspects of man's relationship to animals is "Dance of Death" by Thomas Ravenscroft, a madrigal composer and poet who lived from 1592-1635. This song

depicts animals as man's prey. Ravenscroft's original title for this poem was "Hawking for the Partridge." Ravenscroft included a musical setting of this poem, a hunting song, in A Briefe Discourse Of the true (but neglected) use of Charact'ring the Degrees, by their Perfection, Imperfection, and Diminution in measurable Musicke, against the Common Practise and Custome of these Times. Examples whereof are exprest in the Harmony of 4. Voyces, Concerning the Pleasure of 5. usuall Recreations. 1. Hunting, 2. Hawking, 3. Dauncing, 4. Drinking, 5. Enamouring.[135] The poem later appeared in English Madrigal Verse by John Fellowes.[136] Auden included it in his anthology, the Oxford Book of Light Verse, along with the poem "Ay me, alas, heigh ho."[137] Auden changed the title of the poem "Hawking for the Partridge" to "Dance of Death" for inclusion in Our Hunting Fathers. The Dance of Death also had been the title of a play written by Auden in 1933 and performed by the Group Theatre in 1934 and 1935. This play depicted the decline of the middle class. In this play, Death was personified by a dancer. Rupert

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[135]Sadie, Stanley, ed., The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians (London: MacMillan, 1980), s.v. "Thomas Ravenscroft," by David Mateer.

[136]Fellowes, English Madrigal Verse, 185.

[137]Auden, The Oxford Book of Light Verse, 119-20.

Doone, head of the Group Theatre, danced the part of Death.[138]

Auden's play was inspired by the medieval theme of the Dance of Death, or danse macabre.[139] The Dance of Death was a "literary or artistic [representation] of a procession or dance, in which both the living and the dead take part." In this dance,

> the dead may be portrayed by a number of figures, or by a single individual personifying Death. The living members are arranged in some kind of order of precedence, such as pope, cardinal, archbishop, or emperor, king, duke. The dance invariably expresses some allegorical, moral or satirical idea.[140]

The most important concept expressed by the Dance of Death was that of the memento mori. Since death was inevitable and could strike at any time, one should repent of any wrongdoing and change one's ways before it became too late.[141] In such works, the emphasis was on the

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[138]Carpenter, Auden, 164-65.

[139]Carpenter, Auden, 164-65.

[140]James M. Clark, The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (Glasgow, Scotland: Jackson, Son and Company, 1950), 1.

[141]Aldred Scott Warthin, The Physician of the Dance of Death (New York: P. B. Hoeber, 1931; reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1977), 4.

"horrible and gruesome aspects" of Death: Death was not seen here as a comforter. People in the Middle Ages were constantly confronted with death in the form of the bubonic plague, wars and famine. Scholar Alfred Scott Warthin writes that

> the Middle Ages had developed a death-complex, based upon the fear of death, which it satisfied by the constant contemplation of death's most unpleasant and awful aspects, taking actual pleasure in such horrors. It was a neurotic and psychopathic age, as shown in its superstitions, its religious fanaticism, its sensuality, belief in witchcraft and magic, its pleasure in torture, the dancing manias of the Rhine villages and in a thousand other manifestations of an unbalanced and uncontrolled mentality.[142]

Interestingly, in medieval paintings of the Dance of Death, a knight carrying a hawk is often asked to join the dance.[143] In the poem "Hawking for the Partridge," death comes from the air in the form of trained hunting birds who swoop down on a partridge in the sport of falconry, or hawking. The original Ravenscroft poem begins with the words, "Sith [since] sickles and the shearing scythe/Hath shorn the fields of late." The hunters declare that, since the fields have been mown, it will be easy for them and their animals to catch their

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[142]Warthin, 5-6.

[143]Cummins, 227.

game, the partridge. The "s" and "sh" sounds onomatopoeically depict the cutting of the grass. They address the partridge, telling it to beware ("Dame Partridge ware your pate!"). They say that their hawks will "truss" the partridge. "Trussing" means that the hawk will raise the bird aloft, soar with it, and then return to the ground.[144] The endings to these lines, as well as to those of the last stanza, are all masculine, connoting power, vigor and violence.

Then, the hawks (or perhaps the hunting dogs) are called one by one (there are 32 names in all). The names of the hunting animals are colorful as sound in their own right. For this song cycle, Auden has transposed the names of eight of the animals and the hunting cries, "whurret!" "hey dogs hey!" and "ware haunt hey!" to the beginning of the poem.

Once the bird is caught, the kites (a species of hawk or falcon) are told to soar above the prey to wait for the hunters to retrieve the game (this is the meaning of the command "mark!"). [145] The poem ends with the

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[144]C. E. Hare, The Language of Field Sports (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949), 111.

[145]Hare, 110.

hunters gleefully congratulating themselves and the kites on their success.

To understand this poem fully, it is necessary to know something about the history, traditions and symbolism of hunting, especially falconry, and of the birds involved. Falconry is one of the oldest forms of hunting. It may have been practiced in China as long ago as 2000 BC. It was once a very elite sport, practiced only by the aristocracy.[146] In Book Two of Don Quixote, the Duke tells Sancho Panza that hawking "is only for kings and great lords."[147] In "Hawking for the Partridge," hawking is called a "pleasure fit for kings." Hawking may have been brought to Western Europe by the Lombards, or from Persia. The later Anglo-Saxon kings were avid practitioners of the sport.[148] Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen was an avid hawker. His De arte venandi cum avibus or The Art of Falconry is one of the most famous

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[146]Hare, 102.

[147]Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quixote of La Mancha, 2.9, ed. and trans. W. Starkie (New York: New American Library, 1957), 331; quoted in Matt Cartmill, A View to a Death in the Morning: Hunting and Nature through History (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), 86.

[148]Roger Longrigg, The English Squire and His Sport (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 12-13.

treatises on the subject.[149] In this book, Frederick argues that, since falconry involves the training of birds, which is very difficult, it is the noblest form of hunting.[150] The gentleman hawker was expected to master a huge vocabulary of terms:

> It was as necessary as in [other types of] hunting for a gentleman to master the terms: the large 15th-century manuscript literature of hawking, in all languages including English, is invariably insistent on this point. And the vocabulary grew enormous: no hawk, part of a hawk, natural process, piece of equipment, or phase of the sport was known by the obvious word. As in [other types of] hunting, this had a good deal to do with the proliferation of books in a socially-mobile age; as in [other types of] hunting, most of the English books were taken from the French.[151]

By 1600, fourteen years before Ravenscroft's treatise, hunters were beginning to use shotguns rather than hawks to catch birds.[152] An old saying ran, "it is easier to train a gun than a hawk." A small group of devoted enthusiasts continued to practice the sport, however.[153]

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[149]Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, The Art of Falconry, Being the De arte venandi cum avibus, trans. and ed. Casey A. Wood and F. Marjorie Fyfe (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1943; reprinted 1961).

[150]Frederick II, The Art of Falconry, 5-6.

[151]Longrigg, 36.

[152]Longrigg, 71.

[153]Hare, 102-3.

The hawks used in falconry were captured, sometimes from their nests when young, and trained to catch other birds or rabbits for their masters. The young hawks thus captured were called eyesses,[154] or eyasses.[155] The falconer, a servant of the huntsman, trained the hawks, which required great care, patience, and gentle treatment.[156] Eyesses often were put into a dark, quiet place called a hawkhouse, hack house, or mews. Their masters fitted them with hoods or temporarily sewed up their eyes to "make them more amenable" during the early stages of training. The falconer attached leather straps, called jesses, to the birds' legs and passed a leash through the rings of the jesses to tie the birds to their perches. They also attached bells to the birds' legs so that they could determine the birds' position when hunting and be warned if the bird tried to escape from the mews.[157] Hawks who were let out to fly on their own were retrieved by the use of a lure, which could consist of a live or dead bird or a piece of meat surrounded by

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[154]Longrigg, 17-18, 36

[155]John Cummins, The Hound and the Hawk: The Art of Medieval Hunting (New York: St. Martin's Press), 1988.

[156]Longrigg, 34.

[157]Cummins, 200-3.

feathers tied to a block of wood and a string.[158] The hawks sometimes were assisted by hunting dogs who helped to flush out or point (direct) the prey.[159] The huntsmen usually rode horses, which they mounted on the wrong (off) side, since they held their hawks on their left wrists.[160]

"Hawk" was a general term which could refer to any of several species of birds used in this sport. The species used by the hunters in this poem is the kite, also called a puttock, gled, or glead. Modern-day paper kites take their name from these birds.[161]

Ravenscroft refers to the kites in this poem as "murderous." The ancient Greeks had considered the kite to be an evil omen, and Chaucer referred to the kite as a coward.[162] In medieval and Renaissance Europe, the kite had a reputation for violence, greed, and rapacity. In 1492, the Scottish schoolmaster Henryson associated the kite with the leprous prostitute Cressida in his sequel to

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[158]Longrigg, 36.

[159]Hare, 112.

[160]Longrigg, 18.

[161]Hare, 114.

[162]Edward A. Armstrong, Shakespeare's Imagination: A Study of the Psychology of Association and Inspiration (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1946), 12.

Chaucer's tale of Troilus and Cressida.[163] In Henry V of Shakespeare, Pistol insultingly tells Nym to "fetch forth the lazar kite of Cressid's kind" from the hospital where she is undergoing a cure for venereal disease and to marry her.[164] In Shakespeare's time, "the lazar kite of Cressid's kind" was a stock phrase for a leprous whore.[165] In many of Shakespeare's plays, the kite is portrayed as "a despicable creature symbolic of cowardice, meanness, cruelty, and death."[166] In Julius Caesar, Cassius, who has seen kites flying overhead, interprets them as portents of death for his army.

> [Cassius]: Coming from Sardis, on our former
> Ensign
> Two mighty Eagles fell, and there they perch'd,
> Gorging and feeding from our Soldiers' Hands,
> Who to Philippi here consorted us:
> This Morning are they fled away and gone,
> And in their steeds [stead] do Ravens, Crows, and
> Kites

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[163]Beryl Rowland, Birds with Human Souls: A Guide to Bird Symbolism (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 93-95.

[164]William Shakespeare, Henry V, ed. John Russell Brown (New York: Penguin Books, 1988), 2.1.80.

[165]John Russell Brown, note, Henry V, p. 63.

[166]Edward A. Armstrong, Shakespeare's Imagination: A Study of the Psychology of Association and Inspiration (London: Lindsay Drummond, 1946), 12. On page 17 of this book, there is a table listing references to the kite in Shakespeare's plays and the other images with which they are associated (including bed, death, spirits, other birds, and food).

> Fly o'er our Heads, and downward look on us
> As we were sickly Prey; their Shadows seem
> A Canopy most fatal, under which
> Our Army lies, ready to give up the Ghost.[167]

In Henry VI, Part II, the Duke of Gloucester's murder is compared to that of a partridge by a kite:

> [Warwick]: Who finds the partridge in the puttock's nest
> But may imagine how the bird was dead,
> Although the kite soar with unbloodied beak?
> Even so suspicious is this tragedy.[168]

In King Lear, Lear insults his daughter Goneril by saying, "Detested kite! thou liest."[169] He then asks Nature in horrifying language to make her barren: "Into her womb convey sterility!/Dry up in her the organs of increase."[170]

Some ministers such as Rabanus Maurus and Garner even associated the kite with the Devil:

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[167]William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, ed. John F. Andrews (New York: Doubleday, 1989; reprint London: J. M. Dent, 1993), 5.1.78-87. The editor's note to line 83 reads: "The three birds listed in this line are all eaters of carrion, and thus birds of ill omen."

[168]William Shakespeare, Henry VI, Part II, ed. Louis B. Wright and Virginia A. LaMar, The Folger Library General Reader's Shakespeare Series (New York: Washington Square Press, 1967; reprinted 1973), 3.2.198.

[169]William Shakespeare, King Lear, ed. Kenneth Muir., The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare Series (New York: Routledge, 1989), 1.4.260.

[170]King Lear, 1.4.276-77.

> The kite is the devil, as it says in Zachariah: "And they had wings like a kite's," because, condemned by their resemblance to the devil, they elevate themselves in pride. Kites are the greedy ones, as in Leviticus: "Do not eat the kite or the vulture," that is to say, you should not imitate the rapacious nor the envious.[171]

Natural historians of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries called the kite a symbol of greed and rapacity. Kites were said even to snatch food from the hands of children.[172] In The Winter's Tale, Shakespeare alludes to the kite's habit of stealing clothes from the bushes where they are drying in order to line its nests with them: "When the kite builds, look to lesser linen."[173]

The partridge, the prey in "Dance of Death," also held a questionable reputation. In the Bible, Jeremiah accuses the partridge of stealing other birds' eggs:

> As the partridge sitteth on eggs, and hatcheth them not; so he that getteth riches, and not by right, shall leave them in the midst of his days, and at his end shall be a fool.[174]

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[171]Rowland, Birds with Human Souls, 94.

[172]Rowland, Birds with Human Souls, 96.

[173]William Shakespeare, The Winter's Tale, ed. Frank Kermode, The Signet Classic Shakespeare Series (New York: New American Library, 1963), 4.3.23-24.

[174]Jeremiah 17:11.

This view was adopted by writers and church fathers in later centuries.[175] Partridges were thought to be extremely lustful and incontinent. In fact, "partridge" had become synonymous in English slang with "whore" by the year 1700.[176] Partridges supposedly only had to get near each other in order to conceive. When the female partridge sat on her eggs, the male partridge was believed to engage in homosexual relations with other male partridges or try to lure his mate away from the nest so that they could couple again.[177] The carol of the partridge in the pear tree (the pear tree was a traditional phallic symbol) suggests that the lover is making the lady a gift of himself.[178] The female partridge was said to lure hunters away from the nest by feigning a broken wing, thus protecting her children. St. Ambrose wrote: "Partridges lead hunters astray by their trickery and thus keep them from their nests and from their young."[179]

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[175]Rowland, Birds with Human Souls, 124.

[176]Rowland, Birds with Human Souls, 123-27

[177]Rowland, Birds with Human Souls, 124.

[178]Rowland, Birds with Human Souls, 126-27.

[179]Rowland, Birds with Human Souls, 123-27.

If sexual imagery plays a part in the lore of kite and partridge, there also are sexual connotations to falconry and the hunt in general. This is even implicit in the title to Ravenscroft's musical treatise in which "Hawking for the Partridge" first appeared: he groups hunting and hawking with dancing, drinking, and "enamouring" as "five usual [pleasurable] recreations." The poem itself stresses the pleasurable (one could even say sadistic) aspects of hunting. It is a female partridge ("dame partridge") that is being pursued. The names of many of the female hawks in the roll call (there are male hawks, too) have amorous connotations: Beauty, Damsel, Sugar, Mistress, Minx, Dido, Cherry. "Now shall our hawks and we be blithe," declares the hawker. After the partridge has been caught, the hunter cries with delight:

> O well flown, eager kite, mark!
> We falconers thus make sullen kites
> Yield pleasure fit for kings,
> And sport with them in those delights,
> And oft in other things.

Ravenscroft was not the first to make the association between hunting and sexual pleasure. Plato and other ancient writers occasionally used the hunt as a metaphor for amorous pursuit, and from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries, stories and poems about the "hunt of

love" became extremely popular.[180] In this genre, the falcon was a common symbol of the beloved:

> The bird of prey's characteristics of physical beauty and independence of mind enable falconry practices to serve, as symbol or in simile, to express the emotional and physical attractiveness of woman to man: the man's obsessive wish to bend a free-ranging spirit to his own desires. Shakespeare's images of luring the hawk/lady . . . are well known.[181]

A medieval lyric runs thus:

> Women and falcons are easily tamed:
> If you lure them the right way, they come to meet their man.[182]

In many medieval miniatures and carvings of pairs of lovers, the man (or sometimes the woman) is depicted holding a falcon.[183]

The falcon may be the pursuer as well as the pursued.[184] The medieval Portuguese poet Gil Vicente writes:

> Two goshawks pursue me;
> one of them will die of love.

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[180]Cartmill, 70.

[181]Cummins, 227.

[182]Peter Dronke, The Medieval Lyric (London: 1968), 115; quoted in Cummins, 228.

[183]Cummins, 230.

[184]Cummins, 228.

> Two goshawks of mine
> move round me in this dance;
> one of them will die of love.[185]

Throughout history, hunting also has been likened to war. The Iliad and the Odyssey of Homer contain analogies between war and hunting. In the Iliad, Achilles chases Hector around the walls of Troy as if he were hunting an animal.[186] In the Odyssey, the returning hero Odysseus slaughters Penelope's suitors with a hunting bow and arrow.[187] The earliest known book on hunting, the Cynegeticus (A Hunting Man), states that hunting is "the best training for war" because it teaches a man how to maneuver and attack his prey.[188] In Don Quixote, the Duke tells Sancho Panza that

> hunting is the most suitable and necessary exercise of all for kings and princes. The chase is the image of war: it has its stratagems, wiles, ambushes by which one can overcome the enemy in safety.[189]

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[185]J. G. Cummins, The Traditional Spanish Lyric (Oxford, 1977), 81-82; Translated by the author and quoted in Cummins, The Hound and the Hawk, 230.

[186]Homer Iliad 22.1-476.

[187]Homer Odyssey 21-22.

[188]Cartmill, 30-31.

[189]Cervantes, 331; quoted in Cartmill, 86.

Modern-day writer Steven Lonsdale states that:

> Proven ability to track down animals in the field is a prerequisite in many cultures for joining the ranks of warriors on the battlefield. Hunting and war require similar weapons, skills and inner qualities. A hunting spear doubles as a warring lance; the hunter's ability to plan the strategy of the hunt, to train and set his dogs on the quarry, to aim, and kill the victim, corresponds in war to the plotting of military tactics, the training and arrangement of troops on the battlefield, and the successful capture or routing of enemy forces.[190]

E. B. White equated success in hunting with success in war when he wrote in 1941 that, "If Hitler had ever spent a fall in a New England village, watching the bucks go by on the running boards, he never would have dared reoccupy the Rhineland."[191] Anthropologist Raymond Dart believed that the ability and desire to hunt set man apart from the other apes and linked him rather "with the deadliest of the Carnivora." Both animals and other human beings were victims of man's "bloodlust." Dart linked the atrocities of World War II with man's predatory habits, and considered this war merely another episode in "the blood-bespattered, slaughter-gutted archives of human

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[190]Steven Lonsdale, Animals and the Origins of Dance (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981), 59; quoted in Cartmill, 30.

[191]E. B. White, One Man's Meat (New York: Harper, 1944), 266; quoted in Cartmill, 31.

history" and further proof of man's bloodlust.[192] Washburn and Avis share this uncomplimentary view of humans:

> Unless careful training has hidden the natural drives, men enjoy the chase and the kill. In most cultures torture and suffering are mad public spectacles for the enjoyment of all. The victims may be either animal or human. This behavior is strikingly similar to that of many carnivores.[193]

Hunting has also been likened to rape, in which sex is mixed with violence. Matt Cartmill, author of A View to a Death in the Morning, a book about the psychology of hunting, writes:

> Some of the feelings that many hunters express - the murderous love and other incoherent emotions, the Hemingwayesque anxiety about sexual identity, the relish for doing delicious evil, the false and contemptuous affection for the victim, the refusal to think of the victim as an individual - are also common feelings among rapists. . . . Perhaps the real social pathology linked to hunting is not war, . . . but rape.[194]

In "Hawking for the Partridge," the kites are "eager" to catch their female prey. The partridge is

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[192]R. A. Dart, "The Predatory Transition from Ape to Man," International Anthropological and Linguistic Review 1 (1953): 201-17; quoted in Cartmill, 11.

[193]S. L. Washburn and V. Avis, "Evolution of Human Behavior," in Behavior and Evolution, ed. A. Roe and G. G. Simpson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1958), 421-36; quoted in Cartmill, 11.

[194]Cartmill, 240.

addressed in a "contemptuous" fashion, and the lines indeed reveal a "relish for doing delicious evil." The first two lines speak of the cutting of the grass, a violation of nature, which is traditionally viewed as feminine in Western culture (witness the expressions "mother earth" and "mother nature").[195] The "s" and "sh" sounds at the beginning of the words add to the penetrating effect. This paves the way for the violation of the partridge:

> Sith sickles and the shearing scythe
> Hath shorn the fields of late,
> Now shall our hawks and we be blithe,
> Dame Partridge ware your pate!
> Our murdering kites
> In all their flights
> Will seld or never miss
> To truss you ever and make your bale our bliss.

Hunting literature has often spoken of the ambiguous feelings of man for animals, mentioned by Auden in "The Creatures," of "a desire in which love and hatred so perfectly oppose themselves." Author John Mitchell quotes one hunter as saying, "You see the animal and it becomes a love object. There is tremendous sexuality in this . . . in the sense of wanting something deeply, in the sense of eros. All quests, all desires are ultimately

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[195]Carolyn Merchant, The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1980), xxiii.

the same."[196] The German hunter Heinrich Laube wrote in 1841 that "Love is the passion-mystery between one person and another, and hunting is the passion-mystery between people and all non-human things."[197] In one of his poems, the hunter James Dickey, author of the novel Deliverance, fantasizes about stripping to dance naked with his quarry, the deer.[198] Author and hunter Valerius Geist also describes hunting in sensual terms:

> It's a welcome weight on one's shoulders when one hikes home with game in the bag and a set of antlers or horns protruding from the pack. During a rest break, the hand touches the gleaming points (or the horn tips), caresses the antler beams (or the burr), and plays with the soft hair on the head. Hunting is a passion better men than I have tried to describe . . . . Were someone to call it an intercourse with nature, I should shake my head at the choice of words, but I shall know what that person gets out of hunting.[199]

The famous deer hunter William Thompson writes:

> To see the soft and devious approach of the wary thing; to see the lifted light head turned sharply

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[196]John G. Mitchell, The Hunt (New York: Knopf, 1980), 140; quoted in Cartmill, 238.

[197]Heinrich Laube, Jagdbrevier, introduction; in H. H. Houben (ed.), Heinrich Laubes gesammelte Werke, vol. 42 (Leipzig: Max Hess, 1909), 11; quoted in Cartmill, 238.

[198]Cartmill, 160.

[199]Valerius Geist, Mountain Sheep and Man in the Northern Wilds (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), 153; quoted in Cartmill, 235.

> back toward the evil that roused it from its bed of ferns; to feel the strong bow tightening in my hand as the thin, hard string comes back; to feel the leap of the loosened cord, the jar of the bow, and see the long streak of the going shaft, and hear the almost sickening "chuck" of the stabbing arrow. No one can know how I have loved the woods, the streams, the trails of the wild, the ways of the things of slender limbs, of fine nose, of great eager ears, of mild wary eyes, and of vague and half-revealed forms and colors. I have been their friend and mortal enemy. I have so loved them that I longed to kill them.[200]

The traditional use of hunting as a metaphor for relationships between humans, especially erotic or violent relations, supports the possibility that this song could possess another level of meaning, perhaps political, beyond the literal one. A study of Britten's musical setting in Chapter IV will provide further information concerning this possibility.

Epilogue

The text of the "Epilogue" is as follows:

> Our hunting fathers told the story
> Of the sadness of the creatures,
> Pitied the limits and the lack
> Set in their finished features;
> Saw in the lion's intolerant look,
> Behind the quarry's dying glare,
> Love raging for the personal glory
> That reason's gift would add,
> The liberal appetite and power,
> The rightness of a god.

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[200]S. Pope, Hunting with the Bow and Arrow (New York: Putnam, 1925), 114; quoted in Cartmill, 238.

Who nurtured in that fine tradition
Predicted the result,
Guessed love by nature suited to
The intricate ways of guilt;
That human company could so
His southern gestures modify
And make it his mature ambition
To think no thought but ours,
To hunger, work illegally,
And be anonymous?

The words to the Epilogue, "Our hunting fathers told the story," were probably written by Auden in May 1934.[201] This poem was first published in 1934[202] in the collection of Auden's poetry, Look, Stranger! (later renamed On This Island).[203] At that time the poem was known by its first line, "Our hunting fathers told the story." In 1944, when Auden prepared a retrospective collection of his poetry, he changed the title to "In Father's Footsteps." Humphrey Carpenter believes that this new title was "ironic or flippant," and that Auden's purpose in making this type of change to poems which he had written in the 1930s could have been "to distance himself from the emotions expressed in the poems."[204] Auden apparently changed the title once more, however. In

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[201]W. H. Auden, Collected Poems, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), 106.

[202]Spears, 116.

[203]Hoggart, 102.

[204]Carpenter, Auden, 331.

1976, after Auden's death, Edward Mendelson edited a volume of Auden's Collected Poems. In the preface, Mendelson wrote, "this edition includes all the poems that W. H. Auden wished to preserve, in a text that represents his final revisions."[205] In this volume, the poem is entitled "Our Hunting Fathers."

The Epilogue is written in two stanzas. The first stanza is in the form of a statement and the second is in the form of a question. The first stanza describes "our hunting fathers'" impression of the animals that they killed. They imagined that they saw rage and envy in the animals' faces, and that the animals aspired to a human state, which to them seemed even godlike.

In the second stanza, Auden expresses surprise at something unexpected which has happened. Something has changed and is trying to be like man, to "modify" its "southern gestures" and to "think no thought but ours." Is this something "love," which we would not have though "suited to/The intricate ways of guilt," or is it the animals themselves? Interpretations of this poem, and especially of the second stanza, vary widely from critic to critic.

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[205]Mendelson, Preface to Collected Poems, Auden, 11.

Monroe K. Spears, in The Poetry of W. H. Auden: The Disenchanted Island, points out that, since this poem was written two years before the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers, Auden probably did not write it with the expectation that it would be set to music. Because of this, he says, there are difficulties with a musical setting: "It is a fine poem, but notably subtle and difficult, full of the kind of tension and ambiguity that cannot well be expressed in music."[206] Spears contrasts the two stanzas of the Epilogue one to another. The first describes "with some nostalgia, the older, self-assured tradition which pitied the animals for their lack of reason," and the second "the modern situation in which the goal of love must be the imitation of animal qualities, but without the essential one, their innocence."[207] Spears identifies the last two lines of the poem as a quotation from Lenin. Lenin, writes Spears, believed that one must "go hungry, work illegally and be anonymous," and that "the self must first learn to be indifferent."[208] Auden quoted these two passages from Lenin in an essay on T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") which he wrote in

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[206]Spears, 116.

[207]Spears, 116.

[208]Spears, 161.

1934. In this essay, he cited Lenin and Lawrence as modern exemplars of asceticism and selflessness. Auden wrote that "to us, egotistical underlings, [they are] the most relevant accusation and hope."[209]

Stan Smith writes that the poem "Our hunting fathers told the story" expresses "a crisis in the handing on of tradition and authority."[210]

> The story these fathers told "Of the sadness of the creatures" is no longer believed. It stands revealed as ideology in the anthropomorphic metaphors it employs: the lion's "intolerant look," the quarry's "dying glare," "Love raging for the personal glory," "liberal appetite and power."[211]

Smith believes that:

> The crisis "Our Hunting Fathers" records is a faltering of the old "We" of a collective story, and the seeking of an alternative "We" in the dedication "To think no thought but ours." This break requires illegality and anonymity - a refusal of the name and the law of the fathers.[212]

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[209]Spears, 161.

[210]Smith, 33.

[211]Smith, 33.

[212]Smith, 33-34.

Smith writes that the final line, "To hunger, work illegally, and be anonymous," implies a "furtive obliquity."[213]

Richard Hoggart, in his analysis of "Our hunting fathers told the story" contrasts the reference to liberal tradition in the first stanza with the cold reality of the second stanza in which man must "hunger, work illegally, and be anonymous."

> Our fathers and grandfathers pitied the beasts for their lack of the faculty of reason, for their inability to "progress." In comparison, men were as gods, large, effective, liberal, reasonable, capable of "southern" gestures, the gestures of "love" from the morally secure. This fine tradition the middle classes handed on to their children through home, school and the older universities. But our generation feels guilty about the foundations of its inheritance, about the wrongs it ignores. The same sense of "love" now leads us, more aware, into intricate acts of guilt, into wrong acts for right ends, into forsaking the liberal and humane in our social dealings for the evasive, the treacherous, the sly, into imitating <u>by choice</u> the cunning of the animals, a cunning which, it had seemed, would be irrelevant had reason been granted.[214]

Hoggart believes that in this poem Auden was urging bourgeois intellectuals to become Marxists: to "reject

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[213]Smith, 89.

[214]Hoggart, 102.

even the 'decent' bourgeois values for the sake of a greater value." Our relationship to the beasts has changed, he says:

> . . . our fathers, secure in their tradition, pitied the animals because they hadn't the gift of reason; we (for the sake of greater values) imitate the most unreasonable characteristics of the animals.[215]

At the same time, Hoggart believes that a comment by Auden in a 1935 essay, called "The Good Life" in the book Christianity and the Social Revolution, "might well have been the germ of this poem."[216] This was "the nineteenth-century evolutionary doctrine of man moving

> 'Upward, working out the beast,
> And let the ape and tiger die.'"[217]

Edward Mendelson in his book Early Auden points out that Auden is quoting here from Alfred, Lord Tennyson.[218]

In A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden, John Fuller calls "Our hunting fathers told the story" "an

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[215]Hoggart, 102-3.

[216]Hoggart, 232.

[217]W.H. Auden, "The Good Life," in Christianity and the Social Revolution, ed. John Lewis et. a. (London: Victor Gollancz, 1935), 31-50; quoted in Hoggart, 232.

[218]Mendelson, Early Auden, 215.

intellectual statement of some complexity." He believes that "the effect is somewhat deceptively formalized by the elaborate prosody and orotund Yeatsian diction," and that "its obscurity makes it an odd choice as a text for music." According to Fuller, the first and second stanzas provide two contrasting views of love:

> The first stanza shows how in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was felt to be the driving power which, tempered by reason, provided the individual with his basic motivation. It is like Pope's Ruling Passion, or Shaw's Life Force. The animals are to be pitied because in them the quality is innocent and undirected: only man can consciously put it to a purpose. The second stanza develops the modern view that love is, on the contrary, not a noble force at all, but one to be denied because it inevitably leads to the guilt of individualism and self-regard. "His southern gestures modify" means to sublimate love's genital impulses into not a selfish love, but a universal, social love. Thus the stanzas contrast reason's collaboration with reason's modification, individualism with collectivism, Victorian laissez-faire with the Communist revolution.[219]

In his dissertation on Auden's influence on Britten, John Wells Jennings also speaks of the life force in animals and men:

> The hunter epitomizes the force of love directed by the intellect toward self-fulfillment in contrast to the beast which possesses the "raging force," but lacks reasoning power to discipline it. From his moral and intellectual vantage point, the hunter feels love-pity for the lion, an attitude

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[219]John Fuller, A Reader's Guide to W. H. Auden (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1970), 101.

> derived from the hunter's "liberal" nature and background. Godlike, the hunter sees in the lion's "intolerant look" the same life-force he has within himself.[220]

Like Spears, Jennings believes that Auden's poem is urging us to abandon "liberal individualism" for the denial of self: "Modern man redirects his life force into purposeful action toward a larger goal, one outside himself." Although Jennings does not actually mention Marxism in his analysis, he does speak of "an action coordinated with the actions of others as they pursue together whatever course is required to achieve the common ends."[221] The critic Edward Mendelson views "Our hunting fathers told the story" as Auden's "darkest and most compressed statement of the way we really live - abandoned by Eros to our own devices." Mendelson believes that this poem is not an "optimistic revolutionary manifesto" but "a very pessimistic text." In the final two lines of the poem, writes Mendelson, "Lenin's words are appropriated from a political to an emotional context, where they preserve only faint traces of their origin."[222]

According to Mendelson, Auden contrasts the world of the fathers with that of nature. The animals, who are

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[220]Jennings, 66-67.

[221]Jennings, 67.

[222]Mendelson, Early Auden, 214-16.

below man on the evolutionary scale, are "finished": they cannot continue to climb upward like man in Auden's quotation from Tennyson. Mendelson writes: "in the world of nature the fathers saw the life force - Eros or Love - willing itself toward their own liberal condition of conscious rational love." The fact that these fathers were hunters, however, adds an ironic twist, says Mendelson:

> It was our hunting fathers who imagined they saw a wish for their own glory and reason in the quarry they lovelessly and violently destroyed. Those hunters, who knew all about evolution, hunted not for the evolutionary survival of their species but for sport, and persuaded themselves that their gratuitous killing was thereby superior to the necessary violence of the lion.[223]

In the second stanza, according to Mendelson, Auden is describing the effect of mankind on Love, or Eros.

> Modified by its human ligaments, which etymologically bind it to mankind, Love gives up its "southern" (sunny, open, unthinking, Mediterranean) behavior for the evolutionarily "mature" human will. Now it thinks no thoughts but ours. It hungers because our conscious sense of loss cannot be satisfied; it works illegally because our acts of will violate the common law that love obeys in nature; and it is anonymous because it is concealed within each guilty personal will that gives it direction.[224]

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[223]Mendelson, Early Auden, 215.

[224]Mendelson, Early Auden, 216.

Mendelson implies in other places, however, that Eros manipulates us. He interprets Auden's poem as saying that mankind has been "abandoned by Eros to its own devices." Mendelson writes that mankind, "nurtured in that fine tradition"[225] did not know "that Eros in mankind has no interest in a gloriously liberal order but works obscurely and privately, obedient to individual choice, shadowed by guilt."[226]

The musicologist Barbara Docherty, in an article in Tempo magazine, interprets the second stanza differently from the other writers who have been mentioned thus far. She believes that it is not Love, but the animals (who possess the quality of love) who "seek to 'modify' their southern, emotional, gestures" and who "rage for reason's gift."[227]

Perhaps a clue to the interpretation of this poem can be found in a change which Auden made to the poem for its inclusion in the song cycle Our Hunting Fathers. In Edward Mendelson's book of Auden's Selected Poems, which, according to the editor, follow the texts of the first

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[225]Mendelson believes that "fine has the ironic sense of fastidiously superior as well as noble)." (Early Auden, 215).

[226]Mendelson, Early Auden, 215.

[227]Docherty, 9-10.

publication in book form of the poems,[228] there is a deviation from the text printed in the song cycle. Whereas in Selected Poems, the fifth and sixth lines of the second stanza read, "That human ligaments could so/His southern gestures modify,"[229] the word "ligaments" has been replaced in the song cycle by the word "company." In Mendelson's 1976 edition of Auden's Collected Poems, which was prepared in accordance with Auden's final instructions before he died, the original word "ligaments" appears once again in the fifth line of the second stanza rather than the word "company" which was used in the song cycle.[230] Therefore, it appears that Auden changed the word "ligaments" to "company" for the song cycle and then changed it back again for the final collection of his poems.

Perhaps by substituting "company" for "ligaments" Auden meant to change the focus of the second stanza from love as a force to the animals themselves, who embody that force. In Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, "ligament" is defined as "**1:** a tough band of tissue connecting the

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[228]Mendelson, intro., Selected Poems, by Auden, xx.

[229]Auden, Selected Poems, 33.

[230]Auden, Collected Poems, 106.

articular extremities of bones or supporting an organ in place" and "2: a connecting or unifying bond."[231]

Love's "southern gestures" could be modified by "human ligaments," or bonds. The phrase "That human company could so/His southern gestures modify" seems to apply better to animals than to Love, however. It seems to connote animals living in the presence of humans and being changed by the experience. These animals wish to "modify" their "southern gestures" and become more human. They wish to give up their innocence for "the intricate ways of guilt." This is the other side of the coin to the Prologue of Our Hunting Fathers, in which animals cause humans to long for "nude and fabulous epochs" or to Auden's 1938 sonnet sequence "In Time of War," in which:

> Wandering lost upon the mountains of our choice,
> Again and again we sigh for an ancient South,
>
> For the warm nude ages of instinctive poise,
> For the taste of joy in the innocent mouth.[232]

In the Epilogue, man pities the animals because they aspire to the gift of reason that only humans can attain. The animals are seen as embodying love, but this

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[231]Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam, 1977), s.v. "ligament."

[232]Auden, Selected Poems, 78.

type of love is a brute force, unlike man's "charity." The animals exemplify "Love raging for the personal glory/That reason's gift would add." The "lion's . . . look" is "intolerant." The quarry "glares" at man as it dies. Although our ancestors, "our hunting fathers," killed the animals, they are depicted as, perhaps somewhat arrogantly and hypocritically, pitying "the limits and the lack/Set in [the] finished features" of the creatures which they kill. It is the hunters who interpret the "quarry's dying glare" as an indication of the animals' envy for humans' ability to reason rather than as simple anger at being killed. The hunting fathers see themselves as possessing "The liberal appetite and power,/The rightness of a god." They assume that the creatures see them as they see themselves and thus envy them.

If one interprets the second stanza as referring to love and not to animals, the meaning becomes extremely obscure and difficult for an interpreter of this song cycle to convey to the audience. It is difficult to picture Love, as a life force, wishing

> To think no thought but ours,
> To hunger, work illegally,
> And be anonymous.

If the second stanza refers to animals, however, who, in the company of human beings, have modified their

"southern gestures" and gained a "mature ambition" to be like man, the meaning becomes more concrete, less abstruse, and more appropriate as an epilogue to a song cycle about the relationship of animals to human beings. In this interpretation, the Epilogue, in which the hunter believes that the animals want to become like him, provides a foil to the Prologue, in which man admits that his animal relatives have inspired him and affected his actions.

Synthesis

Unlike the poems in most song cycles, the poems in Our Hunting Fathers are by four different authors and span several centuries. The "Prologue" and "Epilogue" by Auden are written in a highly intellectual and compressed style which is radically different from that of the middle three songs, which are in a much more popular idiom. The "Prologue" and "Epilogue" form a frame which interprets the specific examples of the past relationships between animals and men depicted in the inner poems.

The "Prologue" speaks of the animals' influence on man. The animals have reminded man of his evolutionary origins. They keep him in touch with the emotional, instinctive part of himself and with the life force. He

can learn from them but must remember to modify these lessons with charity, a divine characteristic from above, available to humans but not to the animals. The Epilogue, by way of contrast, considers the way in which man has affected the animals. The animals envy his capacity to reason and to put aside his own needs for the needs of society. It also contrasts the older human tradition of justification by power with the newer recognition of the need to compromise in order to live together in peace.

The middle three poems show man in specific relationships to animals in which either love or hatred prevail. In "Rats Away!," man sees animals as pests. In "Messalina," the animal is a love object. In "Dance of Death," man gets sadistic, perhaps even sexual, pleasure in the murder of animals for sport. The balance of power between man and animals varies from song to song. In "Dance of Death" (as well as in the "Epilogue"), man is triumphant over the animals: the partridges which are killed, and the kites and dogs which man trains to do his bidding. In "Rats Away!," a man is praying to be rid of animals which have caused damage to his dwelling. Although he invokes the highest deities, one is uncertain of the efficacy of his prayer. In "Messalina," the woman is the monkey's owner and protector. Although the monkey is dependent upon Messalina for food and shelter,

Messalina and the monkey are dependent on each other for affection. In this song, death triumphs over both man and beast.

The theme of death is very important in the inner three poems and also appears in the Epilogue with "the quarry's dying glare." Rats, as has been noted, are symbolic of death and destruction. Messalina's monkey is dying. Man, aided by the kites in "Dance of Death," kills the partridge.

All of the animals mentioned in the inner three poems have negative, or at best, ambiguous connotations in Western literature. Their supposed faults often include sexual incontinency or greed. These shortcomings, of course, also appear in man and are perversions or excesses of his instinctual nature.

Auden devised the text for Our Hunting Fathers in a period of his life when he was beginning to question the supremacy of the instinct posited by D. H. Lawrence and John Layard. Whereas before Auden had considered instinct good and evil merely a result of suppression of man's natural instincts, he was beginning also to recognize a need for man to channel his instincts constructively. The 1930s was a tense and violent decade in Europe. Death had begun its reign in the German prison camps, in Spain and in Ethiopia. Fascist leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini

were playing upon their countrymen's instincts and perverting them into violent channels in order to gain power at home and abroad. The political events which had begun in Spain, Germany, and Ethiopia pointed toward the possibility of another large war involving the major European nations. In these violent times, the Christian values of love and charity as well as the communist ideal of putting the needs of the state before one's own appealed to Auden as possible ways for the human race to evolve from violent, animalistic conflict into a divine harmony.

In Western literary tradition, and specifically in the works of Auden, there are many precedents for the use of animals to denote human characteristics. In the 1930s, Auden was very concerned about the evils of society and felt compelled to address these evils in his literature. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Auden selected the inner three poems of this cycle in part for their possible symbolic application to the political problems of the 1930s as well as for their commentary on the relationship between animals and men. In addition, there are political references in the Prologue and Epilogue. In the Prologue, he recognizes that "[the animals'] affections and indifferences have been a guide to all reformers and tyrants." Both the Prologue and the Epilogue end with abjurations to help one's fellow human

beings, to take on the qualities of charity and self-sacrifice, and to channel one's instincts so that one is not led into greed and senseless violence. Unfortunately, the world was not listening.

CHAPTER IV

THE MUSIC

Britten's Works and Style

Britten wrote music for many combinations of instruments and voices. Although a pianist and violist himself, his output of solo works for those instruments is smaller than might be expected. Until 1942, when Britten returned to England from America, his instrumental output was greater than the body of his vocal music.[1]

After 1942, Britten became known mainly as a composer of music for the voice. He wrote several operas, many song cycles, and several cantatas and oratorios. Britten wrote over 100 songs, mostly in cycles. The instrumentation of his song cycles varies. Most are accompanied by piano, but some are accompanied instead by another solo instrument, such as harp, guitar, or oboe. Some are for chamber ensembles, chamber orchestra, or full orchestra, such as Our Hunting Fathers. Some cycles, including the Serenade and Nocturne, are for orchestra

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[1]Peter Evans, "Benjamin Britten," in The New Grove Twentieth-Century English Masters (New York: Norton, 1986), 247. For a list of Britten's works, categorized by genre, see pages 289-93 of this book.

with obbligato instruments.[2] Britten usually wrote his vocal works with a specific voice in mind, often that of Peter Pears. He also wrote for other singers, however, such as Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Nancy Evans, John Shirley-Quirk, Galina Vishnevskaya, and Sophie Wyss, who premiered Our Hunting Fathers.[3] Although Britten's songs include many masterpieces, there are reasons why they are not performed as often as one might expect:

> [Britten's] practice of conceiving his songs as cycles (ranging typically between five and nine settings) that, although not concerned with narrative sequence, do not effectively split up, his tendency to write with a quite particular vocal timbre as his ideal, and his assumption that his interpreter will bring pronounced literary sensibilities to bear have all restricted the frequency with which this repertory is to be heard.[4]

Text was important to Britten, and his literary taste was quite good.[5] As an opera composer, Britten took his libretti seriously. When working on operas, he believed in having close contact with the librettist from

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[2]For a full list of Britten's published songs, including information on the premieres, original performers, and dates of composition, see Peter Evans, "Benjamin Britten," 292.

[3]See note 2, above.

[4]Evans, "Britten," 253.

[5]Evans, "Britten," 253.

the earliest stages of the work.[6] Britten is known for his extreme sensitivity to the text and for his skill in capturing the accentuation, pitch and duration of the language in the vocal line. The famous music critic Andrew Porter wrote that

> Britten has long seemed to me one of three composers - the others being Purcell and Virgil Thomson - who set English words with so delicate an understanding of musical values that even the most familiar lines, once heard conjoined to their music, are thereafter remembered inseparably from it.[7]

Britten successfully set poetry in several languages: Latin (War Requiem), Italian (Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo), French (Les Illuminations), German (Sechs Hšlderlin Fragmente), Russian (The Poet's Echo), and English.

Britten's exposure to his mother's singing from an early age and his later contact with Pears probably helped him to write gratefully for the voice. His vocal lines are generally very singable. At the same time, Britten did not shy away from writing music which demanded

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[6]Carpenter, Britten, 241.

[7]Andrew Porter, Music of Three Seasons: 1974-1977 (New York: Farrar Strauss Giroux, 1978), 31-32.

comparative mastery of the vocal instrument with regard to breath control, agility, range, and dynamics.[8]

Britten's approach to song was different from that of many of his contemporaries in that he considered the sung melodic line to be the most important vehicle for expression:

> [Britten] knew . . . what to react to and rebel against: the increasing tendency of the northern European Romantic style to express the emotional life of a song through harmony, in its accompaniment, and make the voice an agent of declamation rather than the primary medium of rhythm, contour, span and structure, to say nothing of colour. This tendency had become all the more virulent in England, because of the immemorial native embarrassment at expressing one's emotions: the increased scope provided by post-Wagnerian techniques for doing so in a sublimated way, harmonically codified or, as it were, secretly, in the accompaniment, may have been one reason for the upsurge of English song in the earlier 20th century. But maybe Britten . . . sensed that this approach had become pornographic, an outlet for the "dirty little secret," and never more so than in the case of his teacher John Ireland. At any rate, we see him, with the encouraging knowledge that in Purcell he had found an earlier English composer of like melodic mind, going right back to the primal nature of song as sung melody, melody that is frequently self-sufficient in thematic material, harmony and rhythm.[9]

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[8]For an excellent discussion of Britten's writing for voice, see Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, ed. Mitchell and Keller, 59-73.

[9] Stephen Banfield, Sensibility and English Song (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 384.

Although some critics believed that Britten's music was merely intuitive and spontaneous and lacking in craftsmanship, this was not so. Britten took great pains with his works, as his diary entries regarding Our Hunting Fathers substantiate. It is true that Britten usually knew in his head how his music would sound before he wrote it out, as did Mozart, to whose music Britten's works have often been compared.[10] Britten did not compose at the piano as much as most other composers. He only played his pieces on the piano to get an idea of their overall shape. Britten did a lot of editing, however. He believed strongly in the work ethic and worked on a regular daily schedule as did Auden.[11]

Britten was greatly influenced by his teacher Frank Bridge, who gave him a sense of the importance of craftsmanship and clarity in the compositional process. Other Twentieth-Century composers who influenced Britten are Berg, Bartok, Schoenberg, Shostakovich, and especially Stravinsky and Mahler.[12] Of the Baroque and Classical

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[10]Hans Keller compares Britten's musical gift with that of Mozart in "The Musical Character" in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 319-51.

[11]For a fascinating discussion of Britten's working methods, see Carpenter, Britten, 196-97, 200-2.

[12]Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?" in The Britten Companion, 21-38; Mitchell, "The Musical Atmosphere," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 37-41.

composers, Britten admired Purcell, Mozart and Beethoven.[13] He disliked the music of Brahms intensely,[14] as well as much of the music of his own English contemporaries, which he regarded as simplistic and poorly crafted.[15] While Britten was working on the piano score of Our Hunting Fathers, he wrote this note in his diary:

> Work hard after dinner & late bed & even later to sleep. Lennox [Berkeley] has brought with him scores of the new Walton (B-flat) and Vaughan Williams (F min) symphonies & we spend most hysterical evenings pulling them to pieces - the amateurishness & clumsiness of the Williams - the "gitters" ["jitters"] of the fate-ridden Walton - & the over pretentiousness of both - & the abominable scoring. The directions in the score too are most mirth condusive [sic]! It isn't that one is cruel about their works which are naturally better than a tremendous amount of English music - but it is only that so much is pretended of them, & they are compared to the great Beethoven, Mozart, Mahler symphonies.[16]

In 1955 and 1956, Britten and Pears visited Asia, where they heard much native music, including the Javanese gamelan. This music captured Britten's imagination. An Asian influence can be heard in many of Britten's later

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[13]Carpenter, Britten, 229, 346.

[14]Carpenter, Britten, 55, 345-46.

[15]Carpenter, Britten, 52.

[16]Britten, Letters, 437.

works, such as The Prince of the Pagodas and the opera Death in Venice.[17]

Britten's style developed over time. His earliest music contained much pastiche which was, however, cleverly and purposefully done.[18] This earliest music, including Our Hunting Fathers, is often sardonic and biting in tone. Later, Britten's music came to be more serious and dramatic in mood.[19] In his last years, his music became rather austere but at the same time possessed an inner radiance.[20]

Harmonically, Britten's music goes beyond conventional tonality in its dissonance and in its non-traditional chordal progressions. The dominant-tonic relationship is not as strong in Britten's music as it is in the music of the composers of the nineteenth-century or in the works of most English composers of the early twentieth-century.[21] Although Britten's harmonies are often tertian and may center around a certain pitch, they are often not functional in the traditional sense, but may

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[17] Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?" in The Britten Companion, 41-45.

[18]Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 381.

[19]Mitchell, intro., Letters, vol. 1, 22-23.

[20] Carpenter, Britten, 569-75, 587-88.

[21]Arnold Whittall, "The Study of Britten: Triadic Harmony and Tonal Structure," Proceedings of the Royal Musical Association 106(1979-80): 27-41.

be said to be pandiatonic. Britten sometimes uses bitonality to create tension and conflict. A frequent source of dissonance in his music is the use of the intervals of major or minor second or seventh and of the tritone. Britten uses the tritone to great dramatic effect in works such as Peter Grimes[22] and the War Requiem.[23] He alternates between major and minor modality in different appearances of the same chord for dramatic effect in a way that is reminiscent of Schubert or Mahler.[24] Although Britten admired the music of Schoenberg and Berg from an early age, he did not embrace serialism in the manner of the Second Viennese School. He used modified serial techniques in some of his later works, most famously in his opera The Turn of the Screw.[25]

Whereas Britten's early reputation was that of an enfant terrible, by the 1970s many students and critics dismissed his music as being old-fashioned.[26] Important scores such as Our Hunting Fathers and the ballet Prince of the Pagodas, Britten's most extensive orchestral work,

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[22]Evans, "Britten," 275.

[23]Elliott Antokoletz, Twentieth-Century Music (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1992), 509-16.

[24]Whittall, "The Study of Britten," RMA 106: 31-35.

[25]Carpenter, Britten, 336.

[26]Carpenter, Britten, 532-34.

were virtually ignored for decades. More careful scholarship and the clearer perspective of recent years have brought about a fairer assessment of Britten's music and a greater appreciation of Britten's true achievement.[27]

Our Hunting Fathers: Style and Structure

Britten ambitiously called Our Hunting Fathers not simply a song cycle but rather a "symphonic cycle for high voice and orchestra." He may have gotten the idea for this type of work from Mahler's Das Lied von der Erde.[28] The five pieces of Our Hunting Fathers form an integrated whole. They do not excerpt well, although Britten once wrote to a friend that some of the sections, especially "Messalina," could perhaps be performed separately.[29] If the pieces are done in their piano reduction for a recital, a second pianist (but not another piano) is needed for the more complex orchestral interludes, which cannot be omitted without disturbing the continuity of the piece.

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[27]Mitchell, Intro., Letters, vol. 1, 22-23; Carpenter, Britten, 587.

[28]Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?" in The Britten Companion, 31.

[29]Britten, Letters, 516.

The "Prologue" emphasizes the tonal center of C major/minor. The inner three movements have D major/minor as their pitch focus. The "Epilogue" does not resolve the conflict between the centers of C and D, but conveys a feeling of tonal ambiguity. It has been suggested that the five movements, with their contrasting tempi and characters, parallel to a degree the traditional movements of a symphony.[30] "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death," the two faster movements flank the slower "Messalina." "Dance of Death," with its sardonic nature, could represent a scherzo. The recitative-like "Prologue" and "Epilogue" do not easily fit into a symphonic scheme, however, and the "Epilogue and Funeral March" at the end of the work drifts away inconclusively and unsettlingly in a manner unlike the final movements of most symphonies.

A more apt scheme for the work is that of arch form. The characters and tempi of the various movements are symmetrical, with similarities between the first and last and between the second and fourth movements: the "Prologue" and "Epilogue" are slow and contain recitative. "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death," the second and fourth movements, are both fast and lively. The central movement, "Messalina," provides a contrast to "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death" with its slow tempo and

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[30]Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, 69; Kennedy, 137.

long, arching phrases. The pitch centers of the movements follow a nearly symmetrical scheme: the inner three movements center around D and the outer two movements around C, although the last phrase of the "Epilogue" contains some harmonic ambiguity and does not provide a totally satisfactory recapitulation of the stronger assertion of C in the "Prologue."

The tonality of Our Hunting Fathers is pandiatonic rather than traditional. There are many tertian harmonies, but Britten often does not use them in a strictly functional sense. Otherwise conventional chords often contain odd doublings. Some chords contain a root and a fifth but no third. In addition, Britten uses chords built on fourths as well as on thirds. Britten frequently writes the intervals of the tritone, the major and minor second, and the major and minor seventh into the music without resolving them in a conventional manner. Some melodies and harmonies are pentatonic. Sometimes two tonal centers seem to be indicated simultaneously. Michael Kennedy writes,

> The cycle begins and ends in C minor, with the middle movements in D major, D minor and D major but there are passages where the tonal centre is ambiguous or overlapping: one hears this as unrest and conflict in the music no matter what the key signature says.[31]

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[31]Kennedy, 137.

Britten uses several themes or motives in more than one movement to unify the cycle. These motives often recur at various pitch levels, and with altered rhythmic and intervallic content. Sometimes Britten employs them in a truncated or extended version. He does not develop the motives organically, as composers of the Classical or Romantic period might have done, however. These motives appear both in the voice and in the orchestra. As one author wrote, "[Britten] is never one to pad out his orchestration with non-thematic devices."[32] Peter Evans believes this thematic unity was especially needed in Our Hunting Fathers due to the diverse nature of the poetry:

> Auden's anthology, demanding a response both ironic and compassionate, was welded together by the poet's own didactic prologue and epilogue. The composer, sure enough of his ability to match each mood in turn, felt that some more essentially musical means was needed of drawing them all to a focus. The cycle therefore includes much thematic cross-reference . . .[33]

The most important motive, called the motto theme by some commentators,[34] consists of a descending major

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[32]Buxton Orr, "Recordings: Britten, Death in Venice," Tempo 117 (June 1976): 46.

[33]Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, 69.

[34]Banfield, 383; Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, 69; Pears, 61.

triad followed by a rising scale ending on the minor third of the chord (Example 1).

Example 1: "Rats Away!," mm. 31-33, piano score

This theme appears first in the "Prologue" in the orchestra under the words, "O pride so hostile to our charity." It figures importantly in every movement and is played with some variations in rhythm and at various pitch levels on different occasions. Since this theme starts with a major triad but ends on the minor third scale degree, it gives the suggestion of affirmation followed by negation or of confidence followed by questioning.[35] This mirrors the questioning and rejection of the established order suggested by Auden's poetry in the "Epilogue." In this poem, as previously noted, Auden questions society's traditional views of the relationships between animals and men and rejects the liberal tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century "hunting fathers."

Another theme used frequently throughout the cycle is a pattern in which the line alternates with the highest note as it descends chromatically (Example 2).

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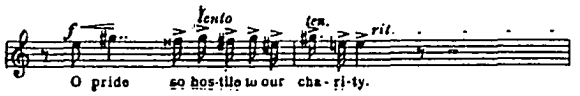
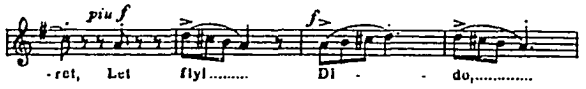
[35]Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, 70.

Example 2: "Prologue," mm. 19-20, piano score

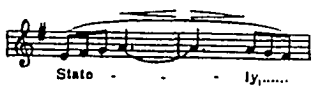


A third important theme, or complex of themes, consists of a rising or falling diatonic scale, often of four notes, traversing a perfect fourth. A half-step may occur between notes two and three of the scale, indicating minor modality, or between notes three and four, indicating major modality. Britten may also expand the interval between the first and second notes of the rising figure to a minor third. The descending scale may immediately follow the rising scale to form a symmetrical pattern. Sometimes the top or bottom note of the pattern is repeated (Examples 3-6).

Example 3: "Dance of Death," mm. 185-188, piano score

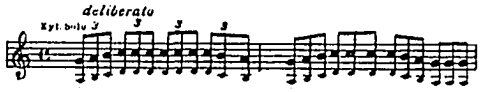


Example 4: "Dance of Death," mm. 157-158, piano score



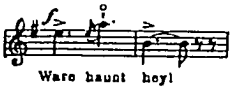
Example 5: "Dance of Death," mm. 31-33, piano score

Example 6: "Epilogue and Funeral March," mm. 1-2, piano score



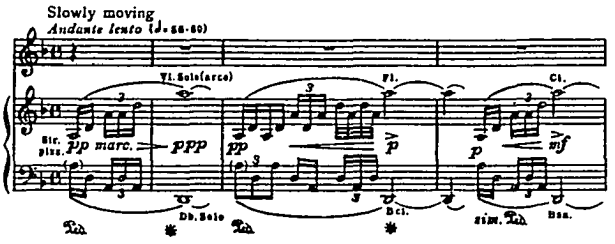
The interval of a perfect fourth, the compass traversed by the scalar motive, is very important throughout the cycle. In "Dance of Death," it appears in a pattern of a rising perfect fourth plus a falling minor seventh. In this series of pitches, the third note falls a perfect fourth below the first note of the pattern (Example 7).

Example 7: "Dance of Death," mm. 27-28, piano score



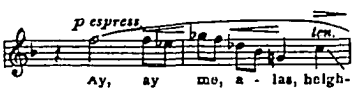
In addition, Britten often uses chords built on open perfect fifths and their inversions, perfect fourths (Example 8).

Example 8: "Messalina," mm. 1-4, piano score



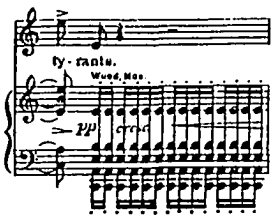
Britten introduces another important motive to the words "ay me" in the song "Messalina." In this motive, F-E^b-G^b-F, the note F is surrounded by its lower and upper neighbors, E^b and G^b. The descending half-step motion from G^b to F sounds like a sigh, which is appropriate for the text (Example 9).

Example 9: "Messalina," mm. 7-8, piano score



Britten often repeats a single note or a chord at dramatic moments to add to the intensity of the music (Example 10).

Example 10: "Prologue," m. 16, piano score



Britten's musical style in each of the five movements corresponds to the demands of the poetry. The style of the first and last movements, which contain the poetry of Auden, is radically different from that of the inner three movements which set Auden's adaptations of earlier poetry. Britten sets the text in the "Prologue" and "Epilogue," which is intellectually quite dense, in the styles of recitative and arioso in which the vocal line closely follows the rhythms and accentuations of speech, and the harmonies shift frequently. Britten's orchestral accompaniment is simple enough to allow the soloist some flexibility in tempo, and Britten encourages this flexibility in his tempo indications. The phrase lengths and the melodic lines in the central three movements are more regular than in the outer movements, but Britten modernizes the sound with dissonances, tonal conflicts, complex rhythms, and unusual orchestration. In these inner movements, Britten is more concerned with the overall shape of the vocal line than with setting each

word in a speech-like manner as he does in the "Prologue" and "Epilogue.

"The overall effect of the music of Our Hunting Fathers is Dionysian, rather than Apollonian. Britten exploits a wide range of dynamics, tempi, and orchestral and vocal color. The vocal line is wide-ranging, from an optional low G_3 to B^b_5. Britten often requires the singer to sustain long arching phrases and sometimes to execute a difficult florid passage. Donald Mitchell writes:

> . . . the innovatory quality that Britten in 1936 brought to the voice part of his song-cycle . . . may - probably intentionally - have had an element of exaggeration about it but, at the same time, represented a dazzling extension of the potentialities of the voice. The boundaries of what technically could be done, given the right singer, were significantly enlarged; and many composers since, knowingly or unknowingly, have benefited from Britten's pioneering.[36]

Britten's orchestration in Our Hunting Fathers is innovative in its use of special textures and techniques.[37] Instruments are often played at the extremes of their ranges as in the works of Mahler, whom Britten admired and emulated. "Rats Away!" begins with wild, irregular scalar patterns in the orchestra which are

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[36]Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?" in The Britten Companion, 36.

[37]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 395-402.

taken over by the voice in a long melisma at the beginning of the piece. "Dance of Death" proceeds at a breakneck tempo. The long orchestral interlude in this song sounds like an orgy of violence ending in chaos and destruction. The movements "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death" are wild and sardonic.

Donald Mitchell draws a parallel between the caustic character of Our Hunting Fathers and that of the opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk by Shostakovich, a performance of which Britten attended around the time he was composing this cycle.[38] Peter Pears also has commented on the sardonic character of Our Hunting Fathers, which he believes detracted from its popularity with British audiences.[39]

Prologue

Britten's note in the Norwich program for the "Prologue" reads as follows:

> Prologue - [Lento quasi recitativo] The words are set in a natural recitative fashion for the voice - supported by simple chords for the full orchestra. At "O pride so hostile to our charity" the strings introduce a phrase which receives

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[38]Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?" in The Britten Companion, 35-36.

[39]Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 63.

considerable prominence in each subsequent movement.[40]

This opening movement, which is through-composed, may be divided into two sections. The first section begins with sustained harmonies in the strings, punctuated by accented chords in the winds, brass and percussion. The voice enters almost immediately in declamatory style, and is offered freedom for rubato by the lack of harmonic and rhythmic motion in the orchestra. Up to the end of this section at rehearsal [2], the orchestral material is quite simple, so as not to detract from the textual content in the voice line. At rehearsal [2] the second section begins. In this section, the orchestra becomes more active, playing more complex thematic material. The note values in the orchestra become shorter and the pitch focus, which had remained at C throughout the first section, changes several times in the second section before returning to the C of the opening. The pitch centers for the "Prologue" follow an arch form, as does the tonality of the cycle as a whole; these centers include C (measures 1-11), E (measures 12-13), $F^{\#}$ (measure 14), E (measures 15-16), $F^{\#}$ (measures 17-18), E (measures 19-20), and C (measures 21-23). A more detailed analysis of this movement follows, beginning in the next paragraph.

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[40]Britten, Letters, 444.

In the section up to rehearsal [2], the orchestral effect is one of emotion seething underneath the surface as the soprano sings Auden's highly intellectual text, only to rise to the surface as soon as the words are silent. In between the vocal phrases, the strings grow in loudness and play with more vibrato than they do when the voice is singing. In measure 2, as the voice sings, "They are our past and our future," Britten has actually marked in the string parts, pp non espress. (senza vibrato). The winds, harp and percussion (including timpani, side drum, tenor drum, and xylophone) continue to punctuate the silences between the vocal phrases. These accented chords suggest heartbeats (Example 11).[41]

The orchestral sonority in the first three bars is a C minor chord in first inversion. The fact that Britten has written this chord in first inversion rather than in root position gives a sense of instability to the beginning of the piece. The fifth of the chord, G, is very prominent, appearing in several instrumental parts at once. This is a departure from conventional tonal practice, where the fifth would be the least frequently doubled chord tone. The voice part in the second and third measures outlines a descending C minor triad. We

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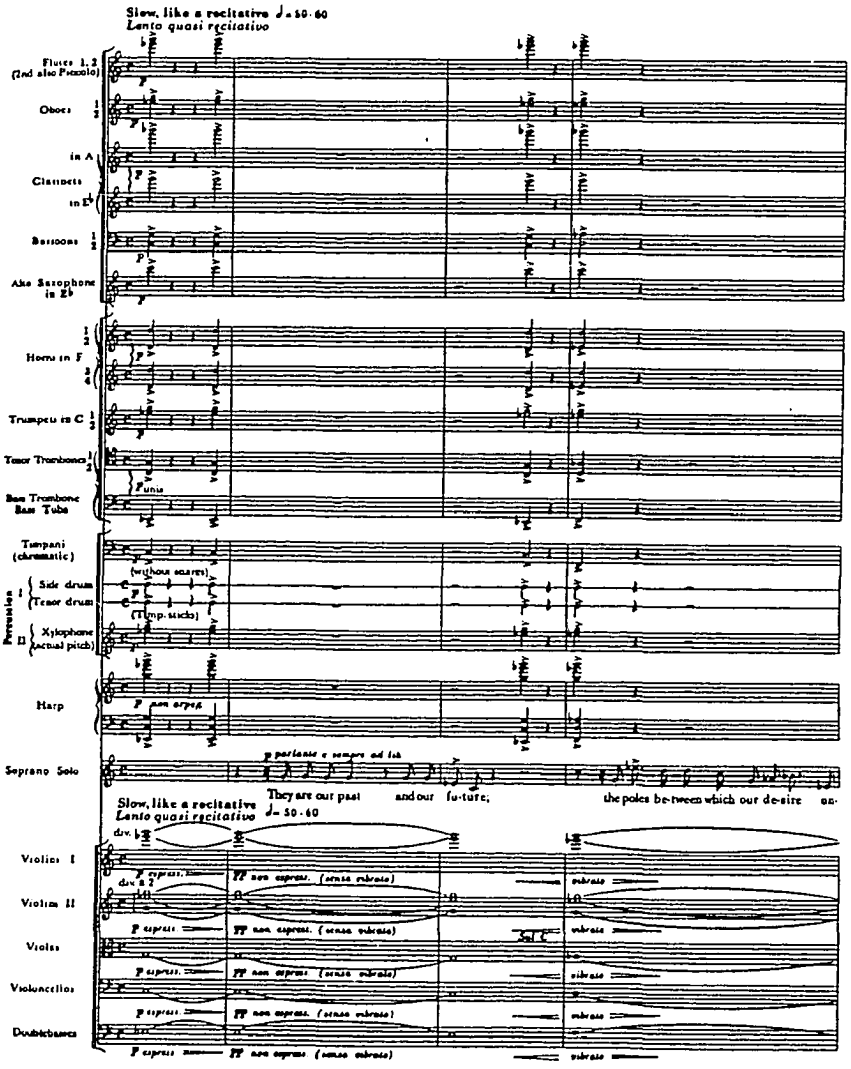
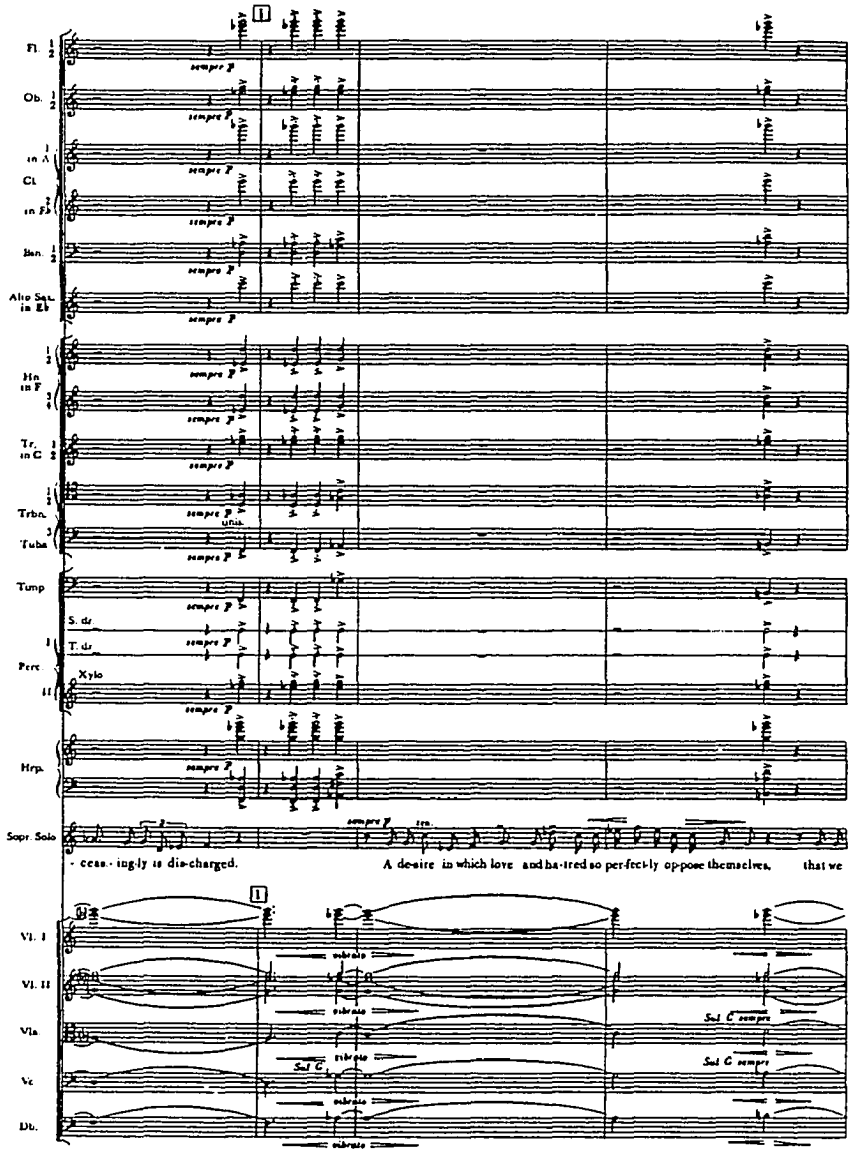
[41]Britten does not include the sustained string chords in the piano score, which from measures 1-11 shows only the wind chords from the orchestral score and two added chords to sustain the tonality in measures 10 and 11.

Example 11, part 1: "Prologue," mm. 1-4, orchestral score



Example 11, part 2: "Prologue," mm. 5-9, orchestral score



recall that a descending major triad forms the first part of the cycle's motto theme - which will appear for the first time in measures 19-21 of this song. The violins retain the G-E^{b}-G sonority up through rehearsal [2]. The violas, cellos and basses, however, move up gradually in the form of unstable triads and seventh-chords found in C minor - except for the last chord in measure 6, which is a V^{7}/VI. The simultaneity of two different chords in the strings creates tension. The lower-register chords do not resolve in a manner consistent with traditional tonality. In measure 4, the lower voices each move up a step (or half step) to F-D-A^{b}, creating two semitonal clashes (allowing for octave displacement) with the upper voices (D-E^{b} and G-A^{b}). In measure 6, the lower voices move up to A^{b}-G^{b} ($F^{\#}$)-C. There is now a semitonal crunch between G^{b}, G, and A^{b}. Both the $F^{\#}$ and the A^{b} sound like they should move to the G. They do not, however. In measure 8, the lower voices move up again, to B natural-A^{b}-$D^{\natural}$. This chord includes a semitonal clash between D and E^{b} and a tritone between A^{b} and D. This chord is sustained with a crescendo up until rehearsal [2], where dramatic changes in orchestral sonority, tonality and dynamics occur.

Britten does his best to make this difficult text intelligible. Important syllables are accented by pitch, accent mark, metrical placement, duration, dynamics or by a combination of these factors. Conversely, less

important words tend to be set to lower pitches, in unaccented parts of the measure, and with shorter note values. In the phrase "the poles between which our desire unceasingly is discharged," for example (in measures 4-5), the important syllables "poles," "(de)sire," "(un)ceas(ingly)" and "(dis)charged" are all set to higher and longer notes than the unaccented syllables which surround them. Each of these accented syllables is set at the beginning rather than in the middle of the beat. In addition, Britten wrote an accent mark over the word "poles" which is arguably the most important word in the line, and set it to the note E^{b}_{5},[42] the highest note in the phrase.

The note E^{b}_{5} is important in the vocal line up until rehearsal [2]. Other than F_{5}, which also appears twice, once in measure 8 and once in measure 10, it is the highest note in the vocal line so far. It is used with an accent mark to set the important words "poles" (measure 4), "deluge" (first syllable, measure 11), and "earthquake" (first syllable, measure 12). At "deluge" and at "earthquake" the vocal line rises by a minor 9th

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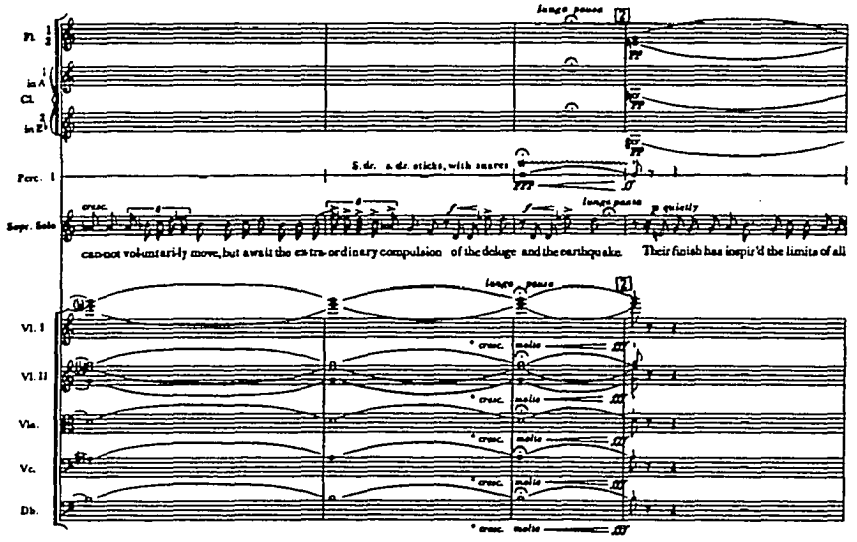
[42]The method of notation used in this dissertation follows the USA Standard, which is described in John Backus, The Acoustical Foundations of Music, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1977), 154-55. In this system, each octave is numbered, beginning with 0 for the lowest three notes on the piano and continuing to C_{8} for the highest note on the piano. In this system, middle C = C_{4}, and the octave from middle C through the B above is labeled C_{4} through B_{4}.

from D_4 to E^b_5. Britten writes an accent mark over the high note in both instances. He uses the wide leaps and accent marks here to help give a cataclysmic effect (Example 12).

Example 12: "Prologue," mm. 9-12



Starting in measure 12, the pitch centers begin to change more swiftly, and the vocal tessitura climbs from phrase to phrase. In measure 13, the vocal line climbs to E_5, in measure 15 to G_5, and in measures 19-21 to $G^{\#}/A^b_5$.

Measure 12 (rehearsal [2]) begins with a pianissimo E minor chord in the woodwinds, which is a surprise after the loud string sonority in measure 11. The vocal line at this point indicates E minor also. The strings are

completely silent from measures 12-16. On the second half of the first beat of measure 14, Britten uses a pentatonic set of pitches in the voice and orchestra consisting of the notes B, $C^{\#}$, $D^{\#}$, $F^{\#}$ and $G^{\#}$. The $F^{\#}$ tonal center of measures 17-18 causes us retrospectively to hear $F^{\#}$ as the tonal center in measure 14 also. In measure 15, Britten emphasizes the pitch class E once again; the vocal line centers around E_5. The G_5 in the vocal line on the word "reformers" and the E and B in the orchestra complete an E minor chord. The C and A in the orchestra, along with the E, suggest a IV^6 chord in E minor. The C here acts as a chromatic intensifier. The mezzo-forte dynamic level in the voice, as the poet speaks of the powerful world of reformers and tyrants, contrasts with the preceding piano passage (pianissimo in the orchestra) which is about the "arts and ascetic movements." Britten sets the accented syllables of the words "reformers" and "tyrants" to high notes marked with accents - G_5 for "reformers" and E_5 for "tyrants."

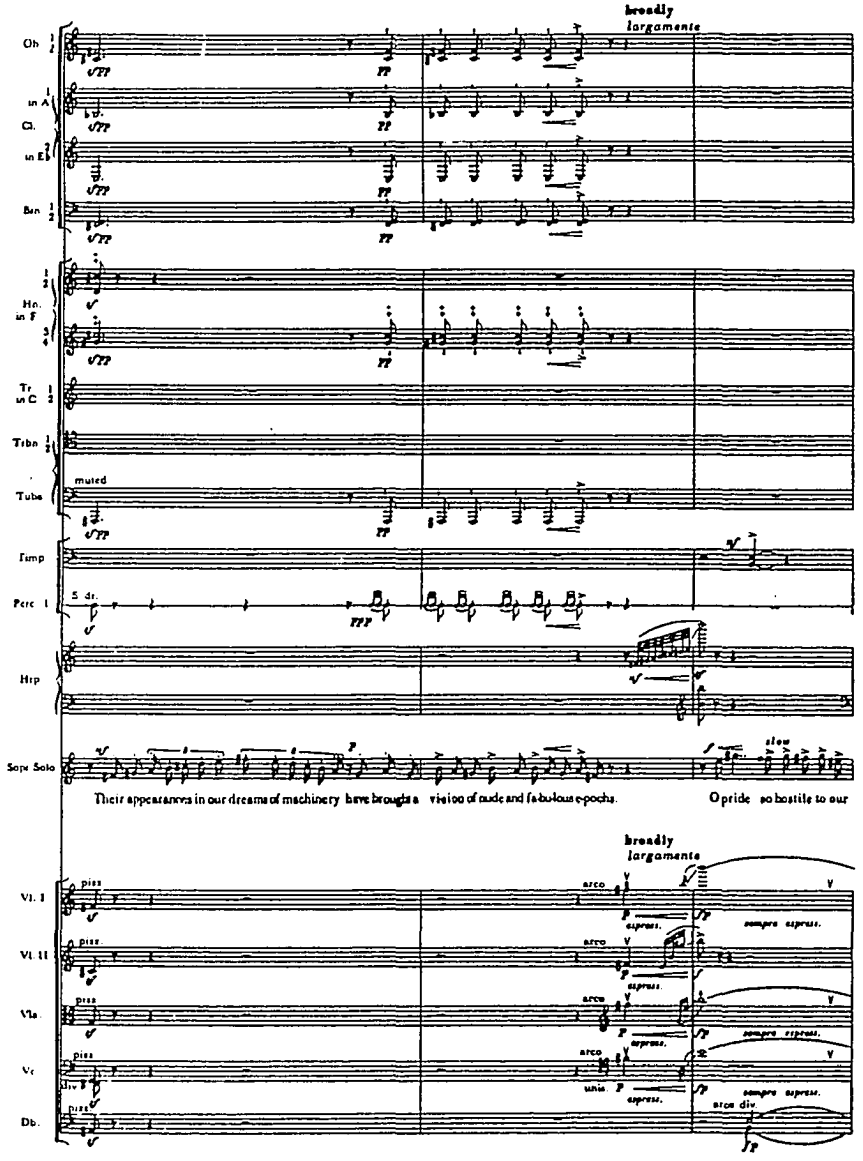
In measure 16, the winds and snare drum make a crescendo in repeated sixteenth notes to measure 17. The text here is "Their appearances in our dreams of machinery have brought a vision of nude and fabulous epochs." Britten writes the voice part here in a very mechanical way to convey the image of machinery. All the notes in the voice in measure 17 are staccato. The line rises in

an F$^{\#}$ minor scale which reaches its high point on the word "dreams" and turns back down again.

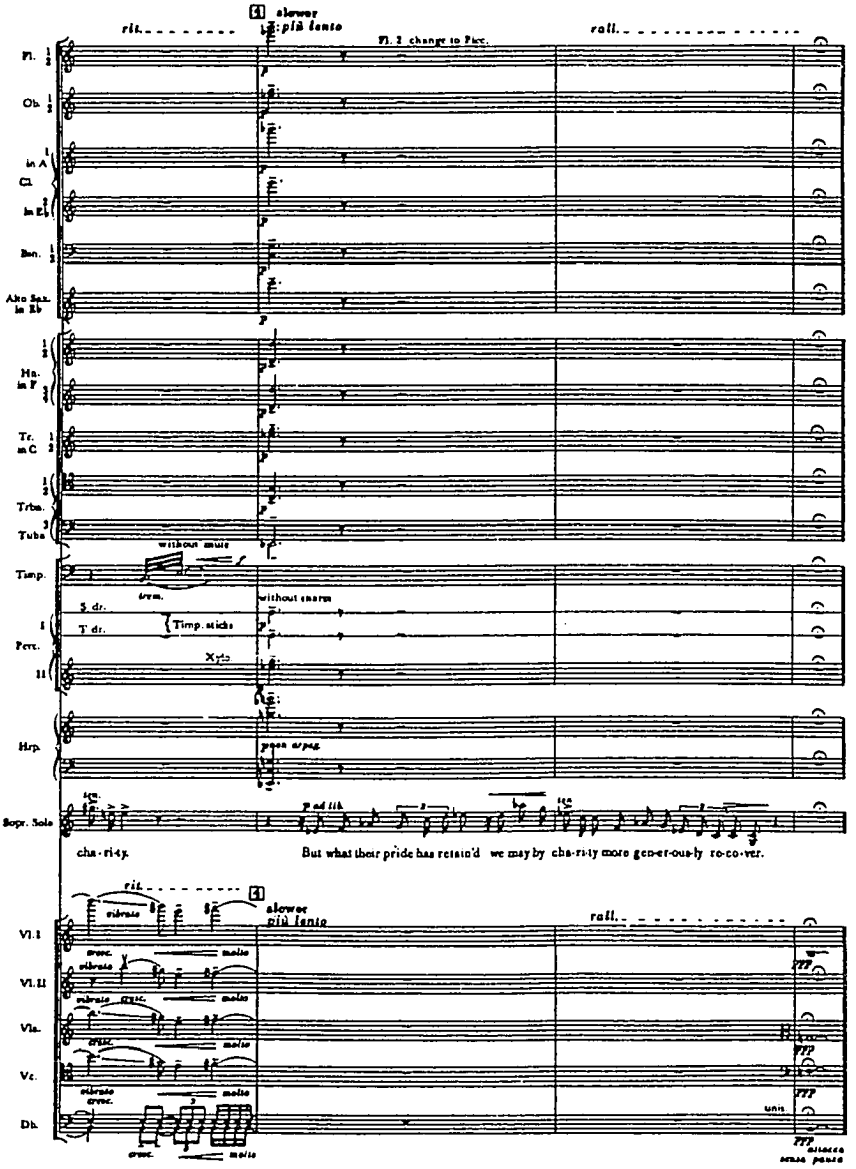
It is appropriate that Britten writes this phrase about a distant dream world in F$^{\#}$ minor, a tritone away from C minor, the tonality with which the song began. Interestingly, the second half of the line, which describes the pre-industrial world, sounds mechanical also: "have brought a vision of nude and fabulous epochs." Perhaps the implication is that although we can imagine these times we cannot return to them. The snare drums, woodwinds, horn and tuba accompany in quartal harmonies as the voice returns to an accented B$^{\natural}$ on the first syllable of "vision," "nude," and the first syllable of "fabulous." The G$^{\natural}$ here serves as a chromatic intensifier to the F$^{\#}$ pitch focus. The accented eighth-note chords suggest the driving rhythms of machinery (Example 13).

In measures 19-21, two important themes of the cycle appear for the first time (Example 13). The orchestra plays the motto theme while the voice presents the descending chromatic motive. The motto theme is prepared by the upbeat at the end of measure 18. Here the harp has a rising scalar passage (F$^{\#}$-G$^{\#}$-A-B-C$^{\#}$-D$^{\#}$-E), echoing the F$^{\#}$ minor scale in the voice in the previous

Example 13, part 1: "Prologue," mm. 17-19



Example 13, part 2: "Prologue," mm. 20-23



measure.[43] The strings, whose part is marked espressivo, play an $F^{\#}$ on the fourth beat and grace notes in an E major triad right before the downbeat. The marking largamente and a crescendo in the orchestra increase the sense of anticipation.

On the downbeat of measure 19 the strings are marked fp and the harp sf. The drop-off in dynamics allows the voice part clearly to be heard in the intensely expressive exclamation, "O pride so hostile to our charity." This is the registral climax of the voice in the "Prologue." Britten marks the voice part forte, followed by a crescendo. Accents and the lento indication at "so hostile" and the tenuto at "charity" show the importance Britten attached to this line of text. The theme here in the voice part is significant also. It is the first appearance in the cycle of the chromatic descending theme. The antithetical words "pride" and "charity" are given prominence through pitch (both are sung on $G^{\#}_{5}$), dynamics, and the tenuto on "charity."

The orchestra plays the motto theme, in octaves, consisting of a descending major triad and a stepwise ascent up to the minor third of the scale, while the

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[43]Britten does not reproduce the harp scale in its entirety in the piano score, since this would be extremely difficult to play on the piano at such a rapid tempo. Instead, he incorporates grace notes from the string parts with the $F^{\#}$ from the harp line to create the melody B-E-$F^{\#}$-$G^{\#}$-B-E-$F^{\#}$-$G^{\#}$.

double basses *divisi* play B and E, reinforcing the temporary E major tonal center. The strings, *sempre espressivo*, joined by the timpani, get louder and slower up to rehearsal [4] (measure 21).

At rehearsal [4] Britten suddenly changes to a *piano* C minor wind and percussion sonority. As Peter Evans writes,

> This major arpeggio descending to the tonic and then climbing to the minor third is . . . an expressive event: the sensation of affirmation suddenly negated is reinforced by dynamics, scoring and harmony/tonality.[44]

The last note G of the motto theme serves as the fifth of the new chord at rehearsal [4]. This chord is in first inversion, as was the C minor chord at the beginning of the piece. The last line of text seems to promise a resolution to the problem of the relationship between man and animals. The final descent in the voice part, accompanied by a dramatic silence in the orchestra, recalls the opening of the movement in C minor. The wide vocal range of this phrase sums up the registral landscape of the entire movement. The final string chord B-F♮-G-B implies a dominant seventh chord in the key of C minor. In an eighteenth-century recitative, one would expect this chord to lead to the tonic C minor. The doubled leading

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[44]Peter Evans, *The Music of Benjamin Britten*, 70.

tone, B, creates a gawdy, sardonic effect. Rather than resolving the dominant-like seventh chord to its expected C minor tonic, Britten chooses to go directly into the next piece, Rats Away!, which begins in a key other than C minor. In so doing, Britten warns us already in the "Prologue" that the problems of men and animals are not to be solved so easily as we might have imagined.

Rats Away!

Britten's program note for "Rats Away!" reads as follows:

> [A] Rats Away! - [Allegro con fuoco] Loud fragmentary phrases for full orchestra, and eventually for the soloist, lead to an emphatic protest from the wood-wind. The soloist interrupts this with a rapid chant, against a very light background in the orchestra. When "St. Kasi" is reached, quick quaver figures in the flutes and bassoons indicate a more subjective aspect of the pests. After a slight lull, the chant reappears in a more dignified form. But this time it is swamped gradually by the orchestra - the fragmentary phrases (from the beginning of the song) even creeping into the soloist's part. At the end the wood-wind protest dies away somewhat hopelessly.[45]

"Rats Away!" was the piece which Britten referred to in his letters as especially satirical and likely to cause a lot of comment. This fast piece is dominated by

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[45]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 444.

rising scalar passages of varying lengths, generally occurring at irregular intervals. These scalar passages graphically represent the scampering of the rats. The motto theme which we just heard in the "Prologue" is used extensively in this piece, in various rhythmic guises, at different pitch levels, and sometimes with modification of its intervallic content. The writing for the voice in this song includes quick bravura scalar passages which denote the rats. Much of the vocal line contains repeated notes, is marked forte, and lies in the passaggio, or area of the voice around F_5 or G_5 where the singer makes the transition from upper middle into head voice. This type of vocal writing can result in a bright, intense, even harsh, timbre. The vocal line in this song ranges from an optional G_3 (C_4 if the low option is not taken) to A_5. Britten uses the wind sonority frequently in this piece. Christopher Palmer writes:

> Donald Mitchell has drawn attention to Mahler's and Britten's tendency in certain circumstances to make the wind, rather than the strings, the predominant sonority in a tutti, and this is responsible for the bitingly, disconcertingly aggressive sound of "Rats Away!" - disconcerting in particular to contemporary audiences, since even the symphonies Vaughan Williams and Walton wrote in the 1930s (the F minor and the B flat), belligerently dissonant though they are in places, still employ the conventional (Elgarian) tutti of strings, woodwind and brass. There is no such

> quarter in Britten: the scoring of "Rats Away!" is raw-nerved and razor-sharp.[46]

This piece can be divided into four sections. The first or introductory section, filled with scalar passages, stretches from the beginning of the piece to rehearsal [7] and emphasizes the pitch center of D. The passage from rehearsal [7] to rehearsal [8], which involves a reduction in rhythmic activity, serves as a transition between the rehearsal [8] to rehearsal [10], the singer attempts to banish the rats with a pentatonic melody, centering around F_5. The pitch focus for this section is F. In the third section, from rehearsal [10] to rehearsal [13], Britten divulges "a more subjective aspect of the pests." In these measures, the tessitura of the vocal line is lower, and the woodwinds accompany the voice with a variant of the motto theme in triplets. The pitch focus of this section is C. In the fourth and final section, stretching from rehearsal [13] to the end of the movement, the voice returns once more to its pentatonic melody, but this time it centers around D_5. The pitch center for this last section is D. The scalar figures from the introduction, which represent the rats, return to interrupt the melodic line. The implication is that the rats have come back.

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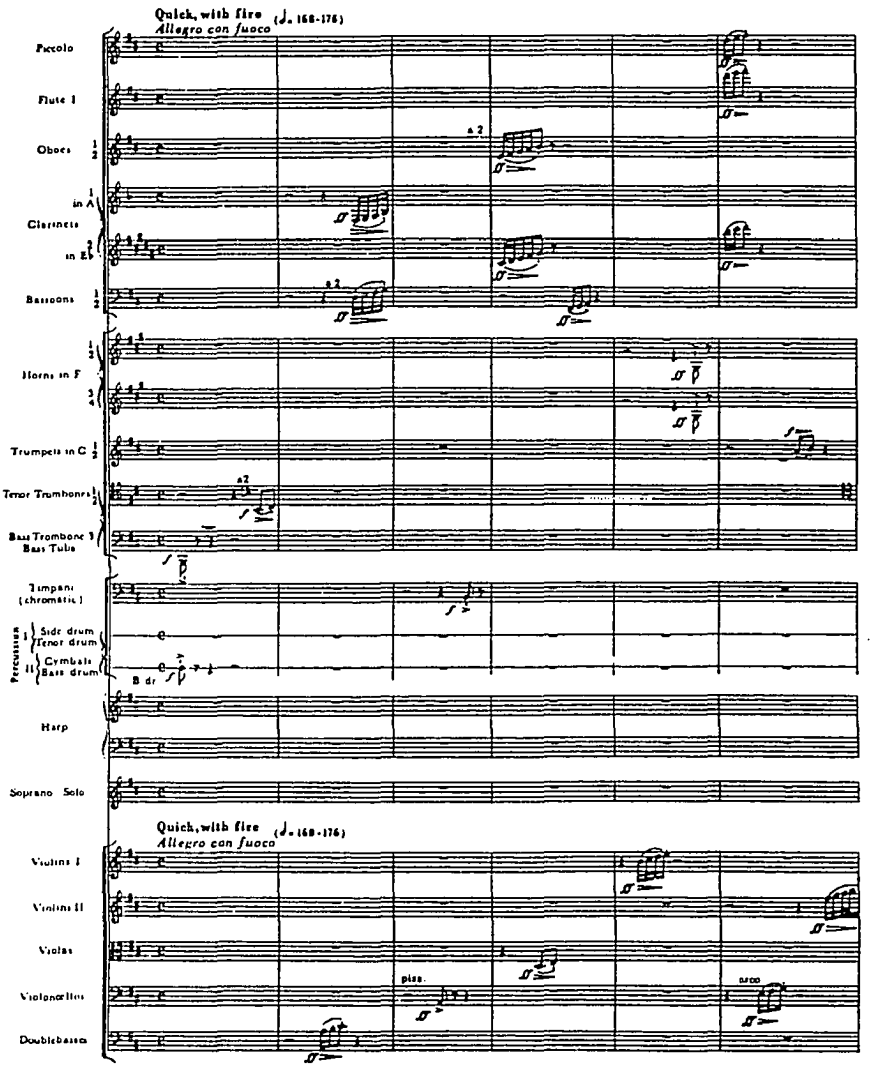
[46]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 396.

The first section, which extends up to rehearsal [7], serves as a structural upbeat to the song. "Rats Away!" begins with scalar passages in the orchestra in eighth and sixteenth notes. Two or three sections of instruments in the orchestra tend to play together one to five note scalar segments. The lengths of these fragments vary in an irregular pattern, thus simulating the frantic, unpredictable way in which rats scurry about. Each scalar fragment is marked forte or fortissimo and is made to taper off in loudness at the end. One group of instruments will sometimes take up the scale where another group has left off (Example 14).

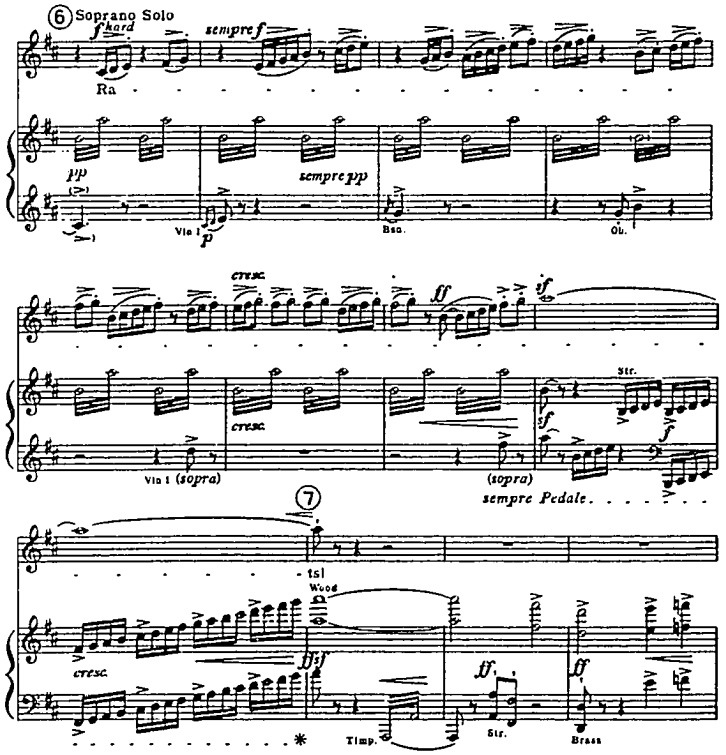
At first it is not clear whether Britten means the pitch center to be B or D. The accented Gs and Es in the orchestra at measure 7 and measure 16 further complicate matters. At the end of measure 19 (three measures before rehearsal [6]), the orchestra begins to prepare for the entrance of the soloist through a more cumulative orchestral buildup by way of compressed rhythmic activity and denser instrumental doublings. In measures 19-20, the harp plays a D major glissando from G_1 to A_6. In measure 20, the cymbal is struck, and in measure 21 the strings enter with tremolos. The dynamics in the strings and cymbal diminish suddenly to pianissimo, but forte $C^{\#}$s in the clarinet and harp presage the entrance of the soprano soloist on $C^{\#}_4$.

Example 14: "Rats Away!," mm. 1-6



At rehearsal [6] (measure 22) the soloist enters with a long cadenza on the word "Rats!" made up of the same type of rising fragmentary scalar material that the orchestra played earlier. The fragments are again broken up into portions of irregular length and rhythm. The vocal line is interspersed with rests, appearing at irregular intervals. The overall shape of the line is rising, although the voice often dips back down to rise again by step, usually somewhat higher than it had reached at the last assay. Starting in measure 25, the vocal tessitura hangs around $F^{\#}_{5}$ and G_{5}, the passaggio area in which the soprano voice tends to sound particularly bright. The soprano part is marked "hard" at the beginning of this passage. The bright vowel of the word "Rats!" further adds to the harsh effect. Britten is telling us already that the song is about a subject which is less than beautiful. The dynamic level is forte, growing near the end of the passage to fortissimo and then to a sforzando and further crescendo and accent on the final eighth note. Within this general dynamic shape, the scalar fragments, like the earlier fragments in the orchestra, are all marked to start at a higher dynamic and taper off at the end. The sparse orchestral accompaniment includes tremolos and scalar fragments (Example 15).

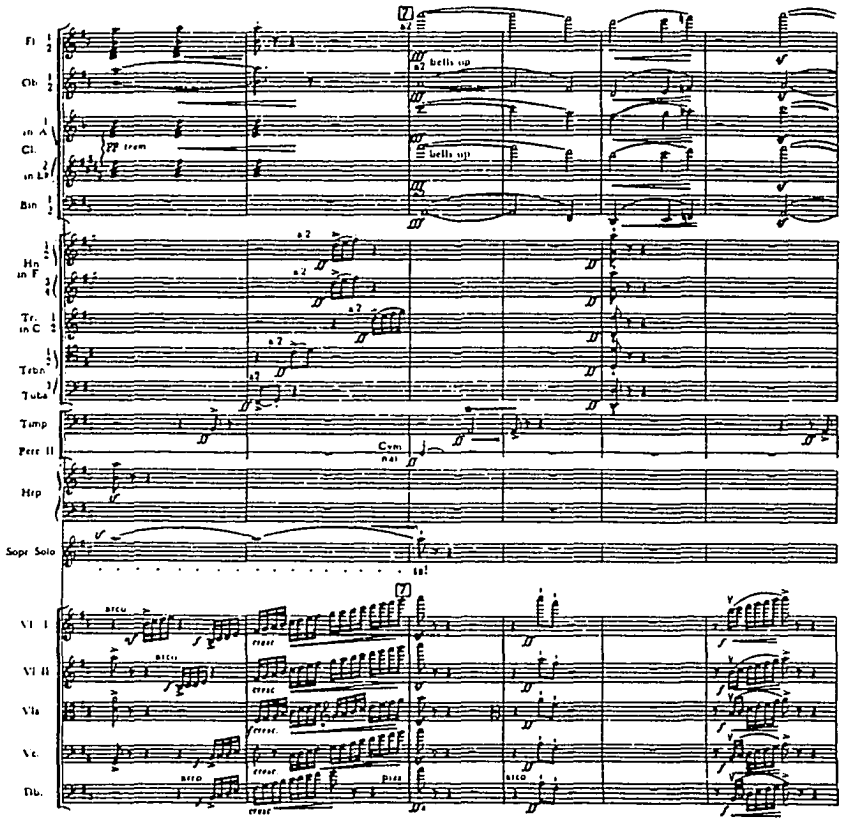
Example 15: "Rats Away!," mm. 22-33, piano score



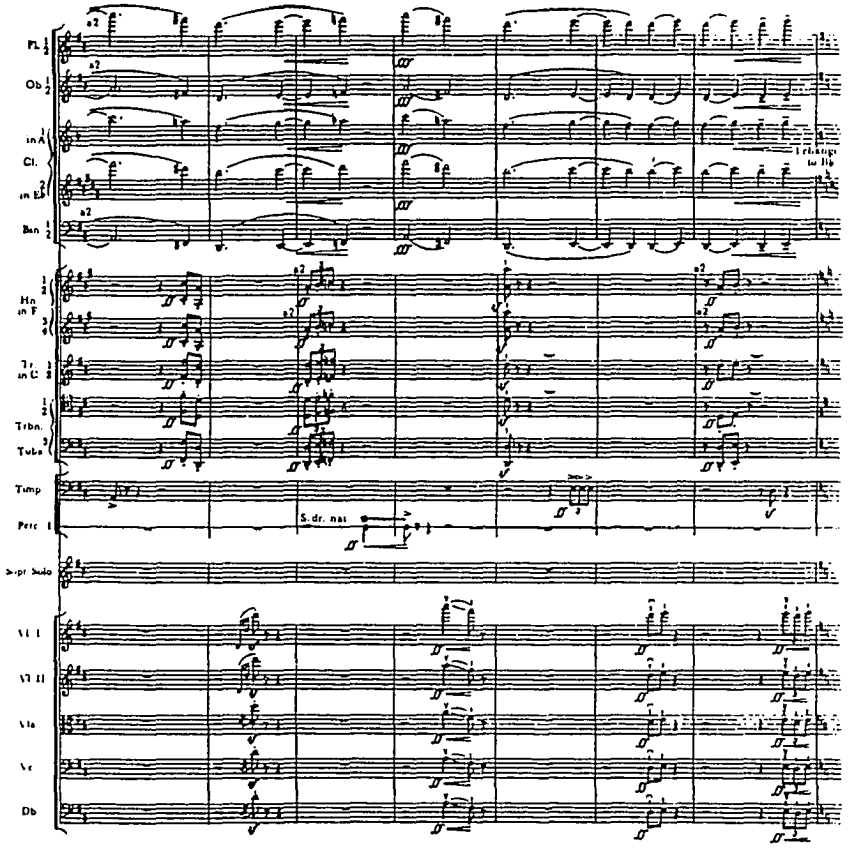
The measures from rehearsal [7] to rehearsal [8], with their reduction in composite rhythmic activity, serve as a transition of sorts. The woodwinds state the motto theme in D in unison in measures 31-33 and again in a syncopated fashion in measures 34-37, establishing D as the tonal center. In measures 38-42, the woodwinds play the theme a third time. This time Britten further extends

the theme with repeating the movement between the notes D and E (Example 16).

Example 16, part 1: "Rats Away!," mm. 29-34



Example 16, part 2: "Rats Away!," mm. 35-41



The brass and strings in this section between rehearsal [7] and rehearsal [8] do not state the theme in its entirety, as do the woodwinds; rather, they interject some of the notes of the motive in rhythms that are different from those in the woodwinds. This is a simple form of heterophony, a procedure in which the composer states the same melody in different rhythms in different

melodic voices. Although Donald Mitchell suggests that Britten became interested in heterophony when he met the composer Colin McPhee, who had just returned from Bali, in 1939, this passage shows an even earlier interest in the phenomenon on Britten's part.[47]

At rehearsal [8], the transitional section is abruptly aborted, with a sudden drop in orchestral forces, a new pitch center (F) and pentatonic pitch organization. The text here is the beginning of the incantation and the real first line of the poem, "I command all the rats that are here about . . ." This section is marked molto animato (very animated), so the tempo is probably meant to be faster than it had been up to this point in the piece. Whereas the previous section had two sharps in the key signature, which indicated D major, in this new section there are no sharps or flats. The pitch center for this entire section is F. Up through rehearsal [10] the voice sings totally in the pentatonic scale F-G-A-C-D, except for one passing note E in measure 68. The orchestra plays E in places, but no Bs or B^{b}s.

The voice part at the beginning of this section is to be sung marcato. In measure 67, the marking is

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[47]Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?" in The Britten Companion, 41-44; Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 396-97.

intensified to molto marcato, and in measure 70 to con forza. Accents, staccato markings and sforzandi add additional emphasis to the voice part. The vocal line centers around the pitch F_5, again in the bright passaggio area of the soprano voice, as if it were a reciting tone in Gregorian chant, albeit at a higher pitch. The soloist sings a "naive, repetitive, incantatory pentatonic formula" to attempt to cast out the rats.[48] The way in which Britten sets this section reveals his attitude toward this kind of naive religious ritual (Example 17).

The voice is accompanied in this section by a solo viola and a muted trumpet and trombone. In measures 47-48 and 61-62, the strings and harp enter with melodic material from the motto theme, as do the winds and harp in measures 54-55 and 65-66. The trumpet at the beginning of this section (measures 42-43) plays a variant of the motto theme consisting of the notes F-D-C-D-E. The trumpet plays the theme again in the next two measures (measures 44-45) with a rhythmic variation.

From this point on, the trumpet plays the theme sometimes in fragments, sometimes with rearrangements of the order of the notes, and sometimes with repetitions of the notes C and D (measures 56-59). These repetitions are analogous to the repetitions of the notes D and E in

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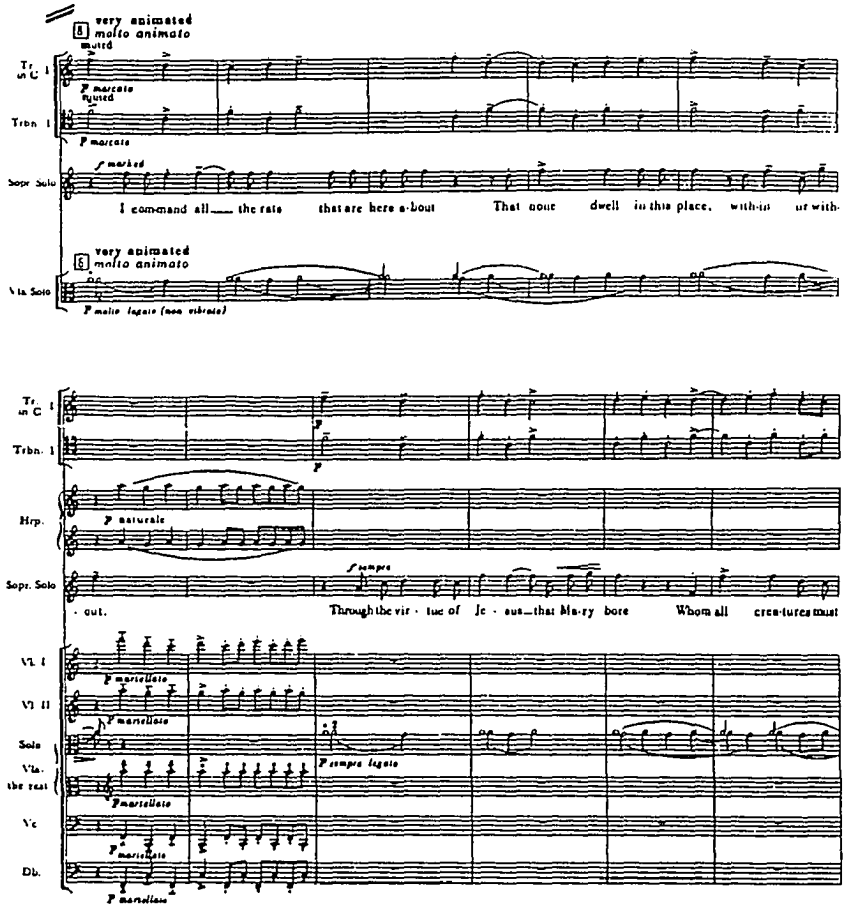
[48]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 396.

measures 39-41. The solo viola plays this pattern of the rising and falling second throughout this section,

Example 17: "Rats Away!," mm. 42-52



alternating the notes G and A. The voice part also rises and falls in the repeated pattern of a major second between C and D or between F and G at several places in this section (measures 52-53, 63, 64, 69-70).

The last three notes of the motto theme, both in its original form and in the variation F-D-C-D-E, form an ascending scale. When one modified statement of the motto theme immediately follows another, the juxtaposition of the notes C-D-E-F results (measures 51-52 and 62). This pattern also appears in the voice part in measures 68-69. Scalar patterns, we have noted, are an important feature of the preceding section of this movement, and are used to denote the scampering of the creatures. Thus, the rats have invaded, on a subliminal level, the section of the song in which the soloist is trying to exorcise them. The four-note ascending scalar pattern, incidentally, will become even more important in the movements "Dance of Death" and "Epilogue and Funeral March."

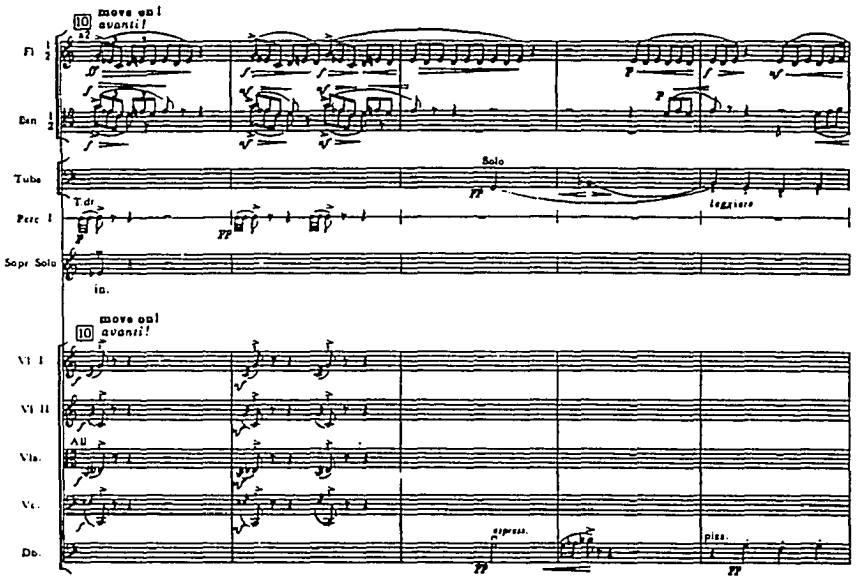
The cello, bass, and bassoon in this section play a pattern which alternates the notes C and F in a dominant to tonic type of motion, reinforcing F as tonal center (measures 47-48, 61-62). The trombone throughout this section plays C and F in a rhythm identical to that of the trumpet, which plays variations and fragments of the motto theme. Harmonically the result is a series of three- and four-note pentatonic chords.

The third section of the movement begins at rehearsal [10] and extends to rehearsal [13]. The key center suddenly shifts to C minor. In this section, the scalar fragments become more prominent once again. The motto theme appears in two modified forms. The alternations between notes a second apart become more extended. The rhythm of triplets is predominant in this section. The voice line, which had centered around F_5 in the previous section, has a wider range of pitch and dynamics between rehearsal [10] and rehearsal [13]. This section may be subdivided into three parts, a type of A-A^1-A^2 form, beginning at rehearsal [10], rehearsal [11], and rehearsal [12].

At rehearsal [10] the tempo is marked **"move on!"** (avanti). The flutes enter with a diminution of the motto theme in triplets beginning with a descending C minor triad followed by the notes D and E . The smaller note values correspond, perhaps, to the diminutive stature of the rats. In this version, the minor third is followed by the major third (outlining a minor triad), rather than the other way around as in the original motto theme (outlining a major triad). Britten indicates the scurrying of the rats by making the line wind in and out in triplets, playing repetitions of the motion between D and E. At measure 84 the flutes, joined by the oboes and clarinets, continue on up the scale. The string bass plays the scalar

figure G-A^{b}-B^{b}, a transposed derivative from the last three notes of the motto theme which is also reminiscent of the scalar figures at the beginning of the movement. Thus, the rats, which the singer had hoped to exorcise, are beginning to return (Example 18).

Example 18: "Rats Away!," mm. 72-76

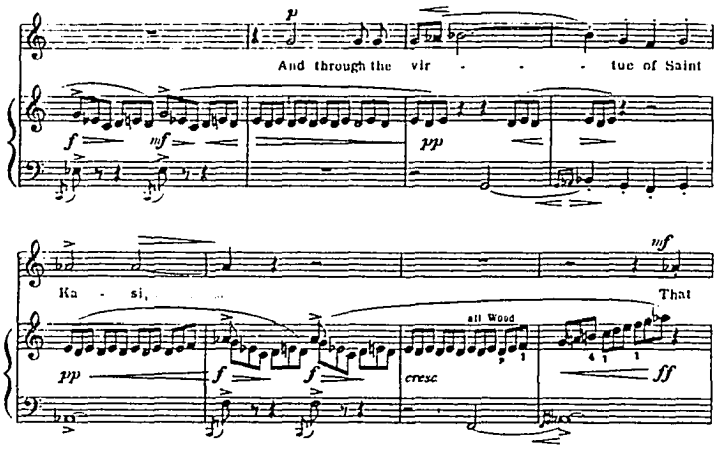


The G-A^{b}-B^{b}- pattern is heard in the string bass in measures 74-75, 79-80, 89-90, 91, and 93. The voice sings this same pattern in measures 79, 91, and 92, as well as the scalar pattern A^{b}-B^{b}-C in measures 95-96.

In measures 80-81, the voice sings the notes B^{b}-G-F-G-A^{b}, which, except for the final flat, is a transposed version of the version F-D-C-D-E of the motto theme which

was so prominent in the previous section of the piece. The tuba and voice doubling here is intentionally repugnant (Example 19). The tuba plays this same melody minus the final A^b in measures 74-76.

Example 19: "Rats Away!," mm. 77-84, piano score



At rehearsal [11] the second subdivision, a varied repetition of the subsection at rehearsal [10], begins. In measures 97-100, the voice sings a descending line of interlocking fifths and thirds. This line reaches its low point on G_4 at rehearsal [12], where the third subsection begins. The vocal line in this section is simpler, with the singer repeating the incantations "Dominus" and "Deus" on the low G (G_4) between rehearsal [12] and rehearsal [13] while the bassoon and bass clarinet play the minor-major version of the motto theme in triplets and the horns play the B^b-G-F-G-A^b variant of the motto theme. This third

subdivision of the section is harmonically static, centering firmly around the pitch C.

At rehearsal [13] the key signature returns to the two sharps of the opening section, with the voice gliding up to a *fortissimo* D_4 on the word "Deus." This fourth and final section combines elements of the first two: scurrying gestures from the first and the pentatonic vocal invocation from the second sections. The vocal line in this section begins with a pentatonic formula now centering around D_4. It is in this final section of the movement that the rats, represented by the same scalar figures as at the beginning of the piece, begin to "swarm" through the "cracks and apertures" between phrases of the pentatonic melody[49] and eventually take over like the shadow side of the personality when one has not attempted to integrate it, but has simply pushed it aside in the hopes that it will not return.

The section begins with a D major chord in the strings in measures 116-19 as the voice sings "Deus" on a *fortissimo* D_5 (measures 116-17). The timpani, trombone and trumpet, however, play short scalar passages in these measures which remind us of the scampering of the rats. In measure 120, the singer reenters confidently on the same D_5. Britten has marked here, *f sempre.* It appears

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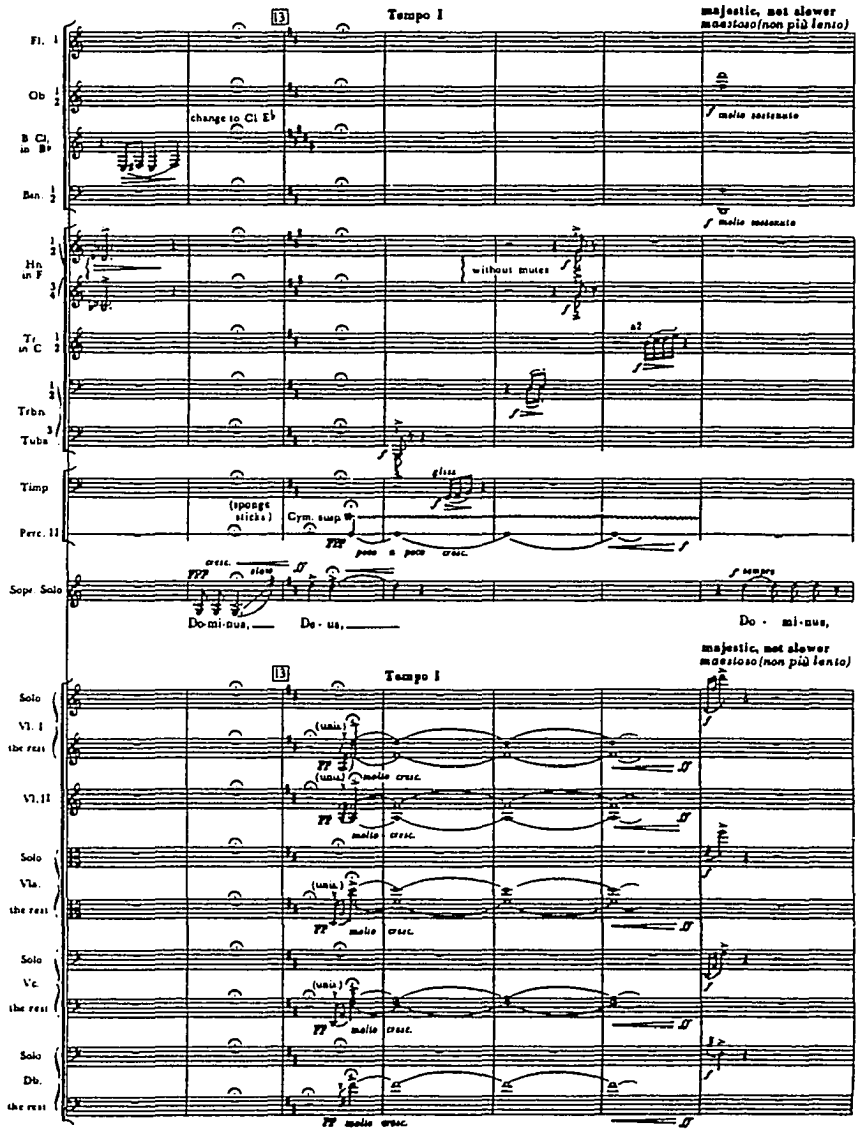
[49]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in *The Britten Companion*, 396-97.

as though the voice will continue to sing a simple pentatonic melody here as it had before, with emphatic repetitions of the main pitch, this time D_5. The oboe and bassoon sections divisi accompany the voice with sustained four-part chords in measures 120-23. The first oboe plays an altered version of the motto theme (D-B-A-B-$C^{\#}$), and the first and second bassoon play the motto theme in inversion at two different pitch levels. The harmonies supporting these outer-voice statements of the motto theme are pandiatonic (Example 20).

Unexpected things begin to happen in the voice part. In measure 121, the voice sings "Deus" melismatically, with a sixteenth-note motion in between D and E. This is the first indication of a loss of dignity in the melodic line. In measures 125-26, the soprano sings "Deliver this place from rats." In measure 128, she sings the word "Rats!" to a rapid three-note scalar pattern in a high register of the voice. Britten capitalizes the word and puts an exclamation after it, as he did in the run at the beginning of the piece. In this instance, he also puts parentheses around the word, making it seem like an involuntary expression or a startled cry from the singer's unconscious. From here to the end of the poem the word "Rats!" is sung eleven more times. Except for the last time, where the voice throws off all restraint in a longer melisma which winds up and down

Example 20: "Rats Away!," mm. 114-120

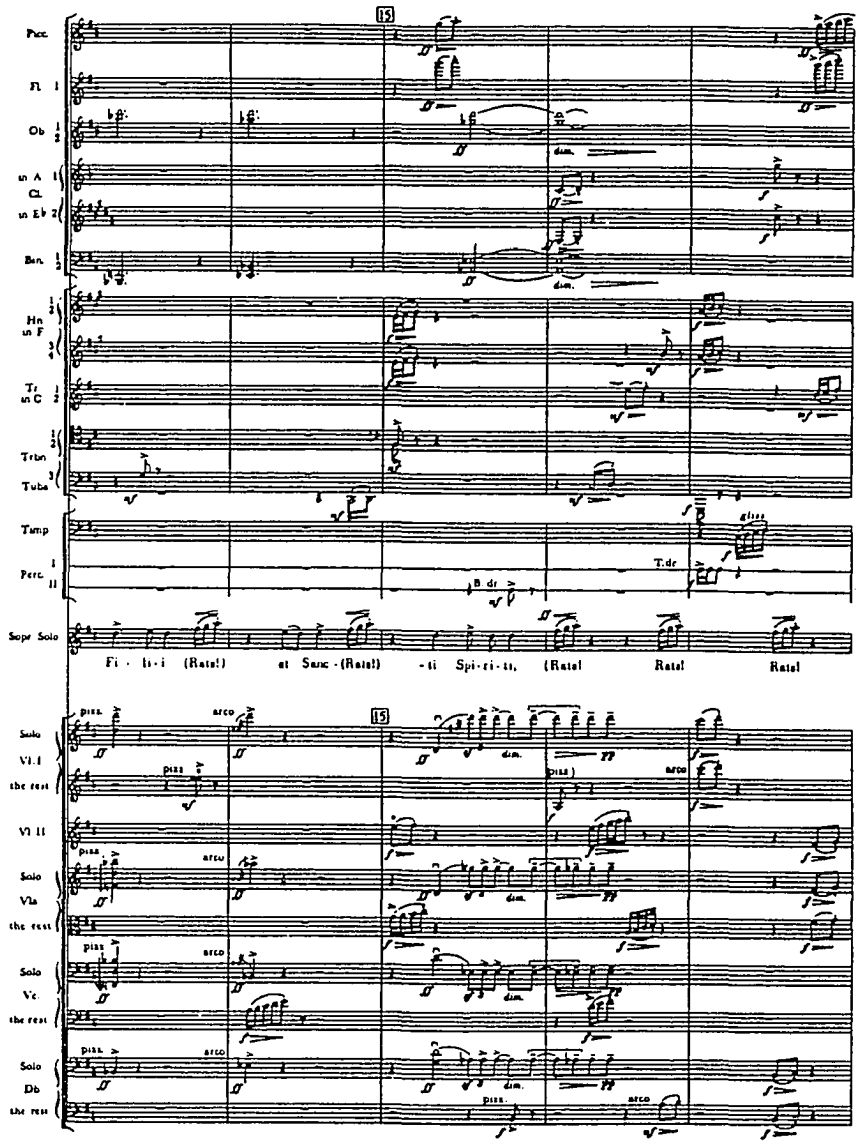


repeatedly from $F^{\#}_5$ to A_5, the word is always sung with the same pitches and rhythm beginning with its appearance in measure 128. Sometimes it is marked fortissimo. Judging by the dynamic level in the orchestra and the lack of any decrescendo in the voice part, it seems clear that Britten meant all the appearances of this word to be sung at least forte. The high register of the vocal line adds to its brightness and loudness.

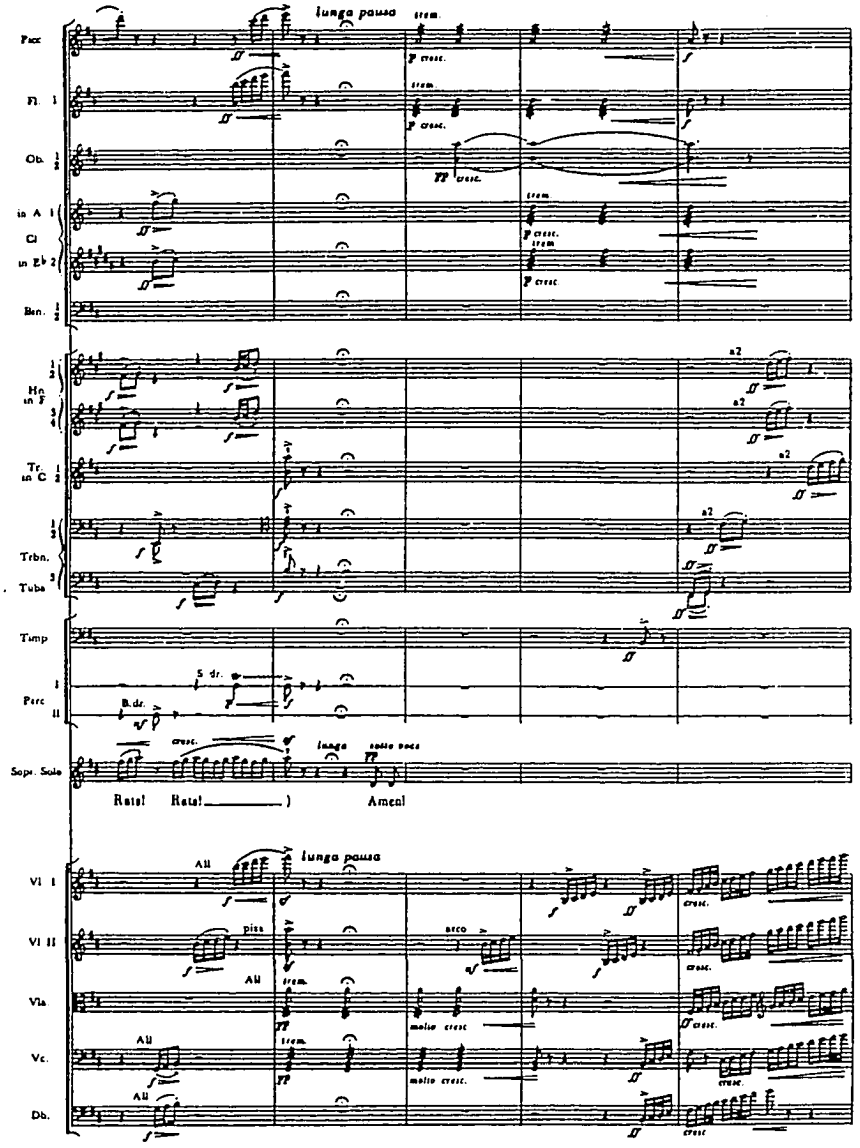
The word "Rats!" keeps returning at smaller and smaller intervals: 15 beats, 8 beats, 7 beats, 5 beats, 5 beats, 4 beats, 5 beats, 3 beats, 3 beats, 2 beats, and 1/2 beat. As the interruptions to the vocal line caused by the insertion of the word "Rats!" become more and more frequent, the interruptions to the poem become more and more frequent also. The solemn invocation to the Trinity, centering around D_5, is overrun by melismas which represent the rats. In measures 139-40, the word "Sancti" is actually interrupted in the middle, between its two syllables (Example 21).

Although the oboe and bassoon chords continue to accompany the voice throughout this section, the rest of the orchestra plays single eighth or quarter notes, short repeated notes, or scalar passages which represent the rats. Perhaps the orchestra here represents the subconscious mind which has been infested by evil or wild thoughts and tendencies.

Example 21, part 1: "Rats Away!," mm. 138-142



Example 21, part 2: "Rats Away!," mm. 143-147



After the voice's abandoned melisma on the words "Rats!" in measures 143-44 there is a lunga pausa in the voice and a moment of suspense in the viola and cellos tremolos in harmonics. The voice, cautiously and hopefully, comes in at a much lower register on D_4, pianissimo and sotto voce, singing "Amen!"

A loud, rising scalar passage in the orchestra culminates at rehearsal [16] (measure 148) in further statements of the motto theme. It is played in D major/minor as it was at rehearsal [7] and serves (as it did there) to close off this final section of the movement. In measures 148-150, the woodwinds state the theme in long note values while the strings and brass interject parts of the theme in heterophony. These three measures correspond exactly to measures 31-33 of "Rats Away!" in pitches, note values and instrumentation. In measures 151-52, the strings play the motto theme in quarter notes, pizzicato, and with the first note of the theme occurring on the last beat of measure 151, disturbing the listener's sense of meter. In measures 153-55, the horns play the first three notes of the theme twice but require the cellos and violas to finish it in measure 156 (rehearsal [17]). By this time the rapid, disjointed scalar passages have returned in the woodwinds. The motto theme continues to decay into fragments; in measure 158 the trombone and tuba play the first two notes

of the motto theme, but in the version with an F instead of an F#. The piccolo mischievously answers in the final measure with a rapid, pianissimo D-E-F# scalar pattern, which finishes the motto theme and indicates the rats at the same time (Example 22). The rats have won, overcoming all pretenses of decorum and dignity.

Messalina

Britten's program note for "Messalina" reads as follows:

> [B] Messalina [Andante Lento] Alternating with some emotional string passages the soloist repeatedly laments "Ay me, alas, heigh-ho!" Then she tells the sad story in a simple melodic line, which grows more and more passionate. A horn glissando is the climax, then a long series of heart-broken lamentations follows - started by the soloist and culminating with the saxophone. A few quiet chords for violas and 'cellos commit the soul to rest.[50]

Messalina, the central song of the cycle, is in a slow tempo which contrasts with the songs which precede and follow, "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death." It is much more lyrical than these other two songs and, unlike them, is not satirical in tone. Whereas in "Rats Away!" man feels victimized by animals and in "Dance of Death" he

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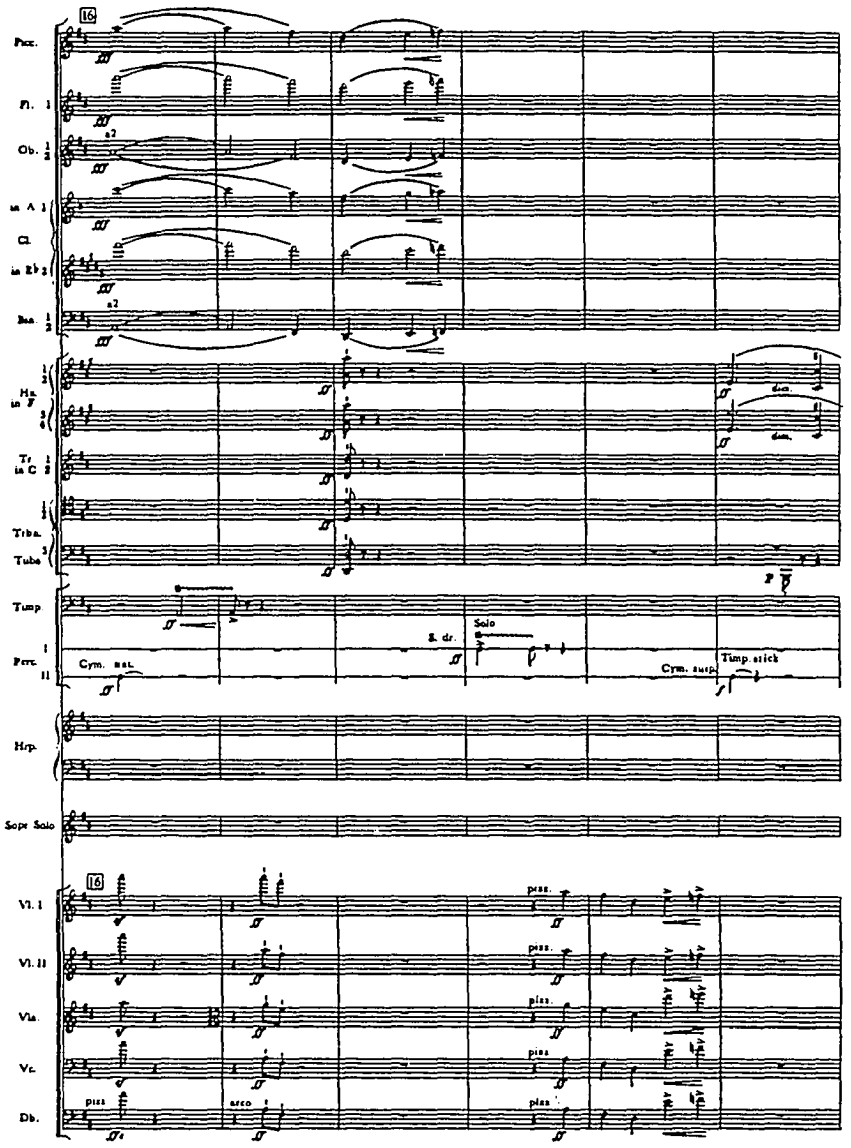
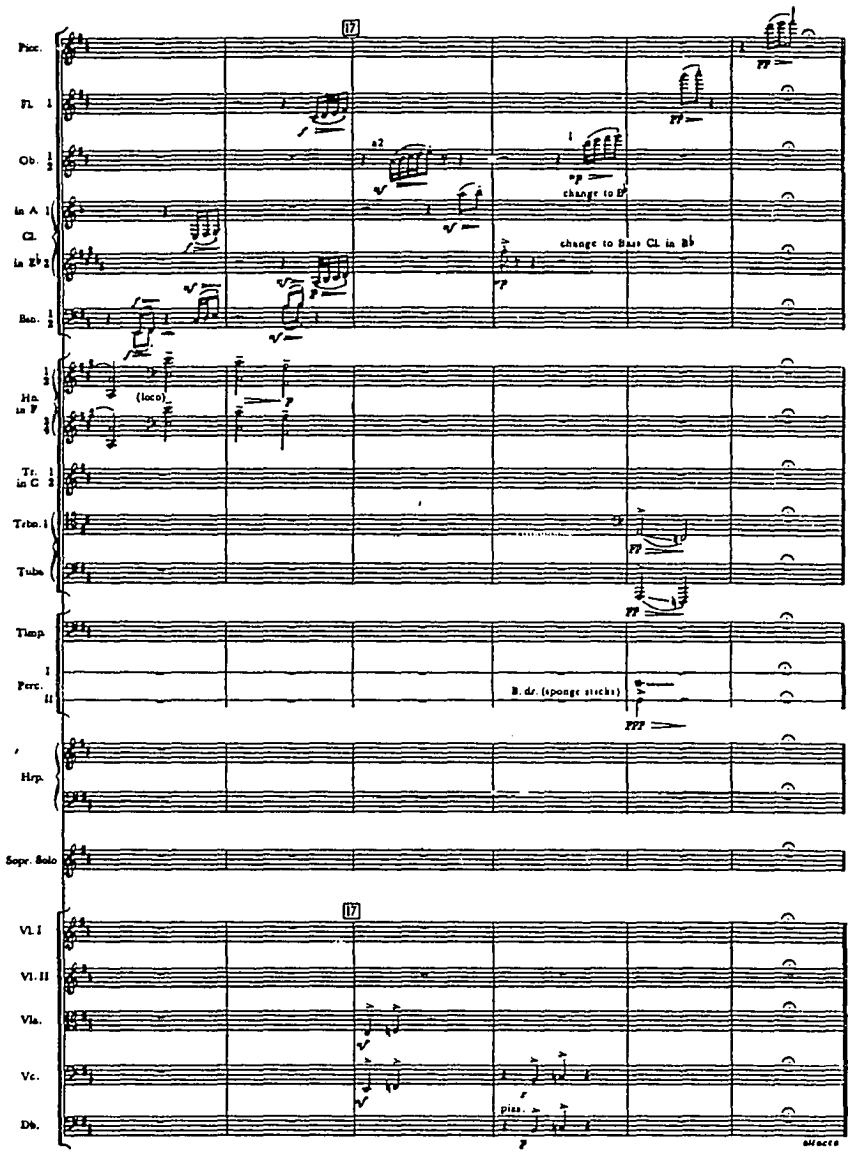
[50]Britten, Letters, 444.

Example 22, part 1: "Rats Away!," mm. 148-143



Example 22, part 2: "Rats Away!," mm. 154-159



makes them his prey, in "Messalina" human being and animal love each other, only to be separated by death.

"Messalina," like "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death," begins and ends on the pitch focus D. The first section, from measure 1 to measure 27, consists of many open fifths, mostly A-D, but also B^{b}-F. The main pitch focus here is D, with B^{b} serving as a secondary pitch focus. The text in this section consists solely of the words "ay me, alas, heigh-ho!" repeated three times. Britten uses the motto theme and introduces a new motive on the words "ay me," which he will develop later in the piece.

In the second section of the piece, from measure 27 (rehearsal [21]) to measure 53, the voice sings a simple melody. This section contains all but the first and last lines of the poem. Britten uses mostly conjunct motion, often stepwise, in the vocal and instrumental melodies. Brief tonal centers in this section are D (measures 27-32), F (measures 33-35), A^{b} (measures 36-37), $F^{\#}$ (measures 38-41), E (measures 42-46) and D (measures 47-54).

The third section begins in measure 54 (rehearsal [24]) and consists of a wide-ranging and highly emotional cadenza in the voice on the last word of the poem, "Fie!," sung thirty-three times and based melodically on the cycle's motto theme. The pitch focus changes frequently in this section also, beginning on E^{b} in measure 54,

descending alternately by major and minor thirds, and ending on F in measure 65.

The last section of the piece begins in measure 66 (rehearsal [26]) as the voice repeats its final eight "fie's." This postlude consists of several highly expressive instrumental solos which continue to express Messalina's grief long after she has exhausted herself with crying. In all these solos, Britten spins out the "ay me" motive. Each solo contains its own pitch focus, but the underlying tonal center is D, which Britten repeats as a pedal point constantly to the end of the song, finally letting it die away as if it were the heartbeat of the dying monkey.

According to Colin Matthews who talked to Britten about Our Hunting Fathers in 1976, Britten was embarrassed in later life by "Messalina," which he said was "over the top," that is, too emotional.[51] Donald Mitchell writes that

> the music . . . - by converting the sentiment of the poem into a torrential paroxysm of grief - adds a wholly new dimension to the text: the shock of it should shake one into a new perception of what men and animals might mean to each other.[52]

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[51]Carpenter, Benjamin Britten, 89.

[52]Donald Mitchell, Britten and Auden in the Thirties: The Year 1936 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 41.

Peter Evans believed that "perhaps the lamentation is somewhat overdrawn, but it is not satirized, for it springs from the human capacity for love."[53]

Christopher Palmer writes,

> nothing could be simpler than Messalina's hymn-like song of grief with its step-wise melodic motion and rhythmic regularity. Yet the outpouring of woe in which all culminates must be one of the most impassioned and tumultuous in all Britten; and in this respect the soprano voice is preferable to the tenor, since female hysteria is undeniably more wither-wringing and heartstring-pulling than the male . . .[54]

Peter Pears writes,

> Messalina (the song of animals as pets) is a lovely, touching and essentially simple lament, but one which uses the whole scale of colour in voice and orchestra. The motto, scored in characteristically "solo" fashion, introduces a poignant cry three times repeated - increasingly intense. Britten has always used the trick of accumulation by varied repetition most cunningly . . . The little tune for the dead monkey is a scale of five notes with a drop of a fifth in it from time to time . . . Britten's melodic invention is one of his gifts to be most thankful for. This tune, suitably folky at first, breaks away into key after key, until back it comes to a great melisma on "Fie, fie, fie." Several of the characteristics of the composer are already clear in this song; the economy of

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[53]Peter Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, 71.

[54]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," Britten Companion, 398.

> material which creates a whole song from two phrases; the vocal line which makes use ofthe whole voice, in both simple and elaborate ways; the strongly pointed interludes between the phrases; the soloistic orchestration which turns right away from lush string tuttis; the rapid fan-like opening out in a crescendo modulation . . .[55]

Unlike "Rats Away!" the strings are more prominent than the winds in "Messalina." Christopher Palmer believes that Britten emphasizes strings in this piece because this song is closer to the realm of human emotions, rather than to "nature." Britten, like Mahler, writes Palmer, uses orchestral textures heavy in wind sonority to denote nature and those heavy in string sound to denote human emotions.[56] "The strings of all instruments are those which correspond most nearly to the naked human voice," he writes.[57] We also recall that the poem itself describes the relationship between a human being and a monkey, which is closest on the evolutionary scale to humans of all the animals in this song cycle, and that the monkey itself may even be a symbol for a human lover.

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[55]Peter Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 61-62.

[56]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in Britten Companion, 396-98. For this point Palmer also draws on Mitchell, Gustav Mahler: The Wunderhorn Years (London: Faber and Faber, 1975),325ff.

[57]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Song Cycles," in The Britten Companion, 327.

Messalina, the second of the inner three pieces, begins with open fifths on the notes A and D. This open fifth chord is "spread through and amplified by highly elaborate ten-part string texture."[58] The open fifths make the modality ambiguous: is the piece in D major or D minor? The orchestral accompaniment begins on a single note A and fans out to the range of two octaves plus a fifth. The dynamics in measures 1-6 range from **ppp** to somewhat louder than **ff.** Rhythmic flexibility and ambiguity are achieved with the complex cross-rhythms in the strings and a misplaced feeling of the downbeat on the third beat of measures 3 and 4. In measures 3-6, Britten writes the motto theme of the cycle in the key of D major/minor as he had in "Rats Away!" but in a different rhythm. As in the "Prologue," the theme starts loud and gets softer. This fact, coupled with the $F^{\#}$ in measure 6 being followed by $F^{\natural}$ in measure 7, further makes this theme sound like an affirmation followed by a negation. In measures 7 and 8, the orchestra plays the open fifth with $B^{\flat}$ and F, providing a brief harmonic departure to $B^{\flat}$ minor (vi of D minor) (Example 23).

In measure 7, the voice enters, piano and espressivo, with Messalina's lament. The vocal line in beat four of measure 7 and beat one of measure 8,

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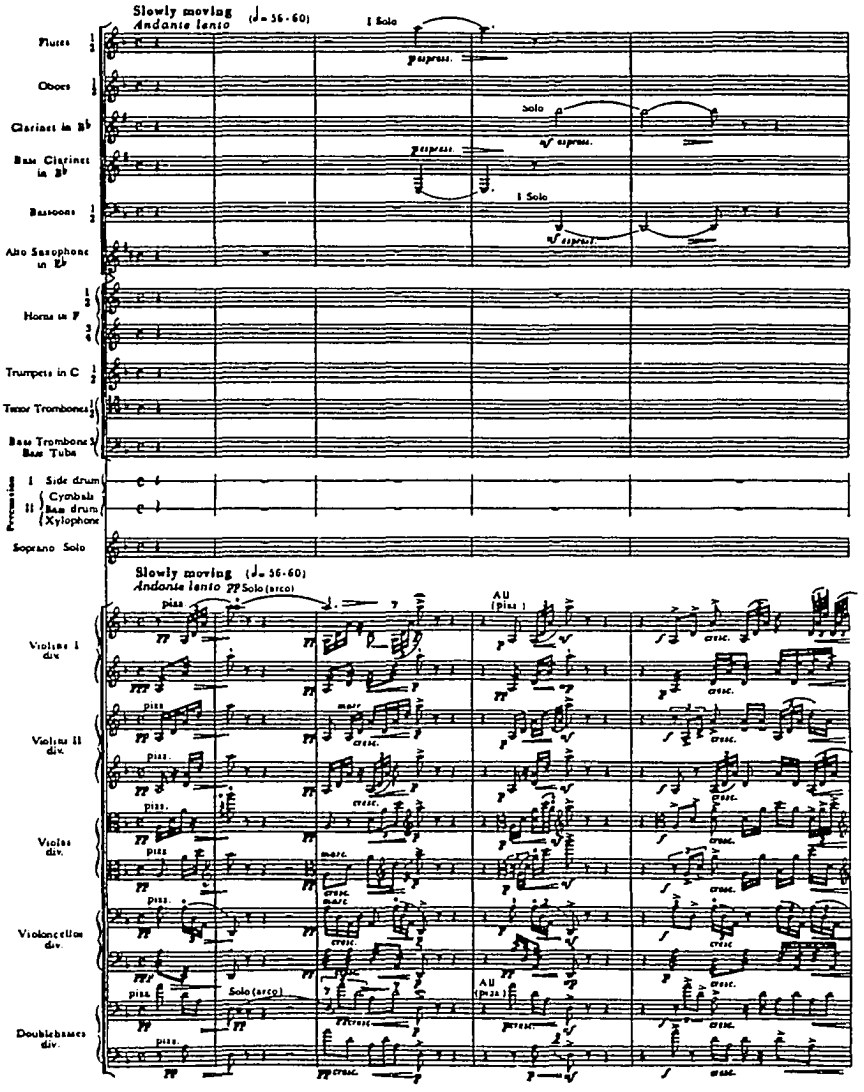
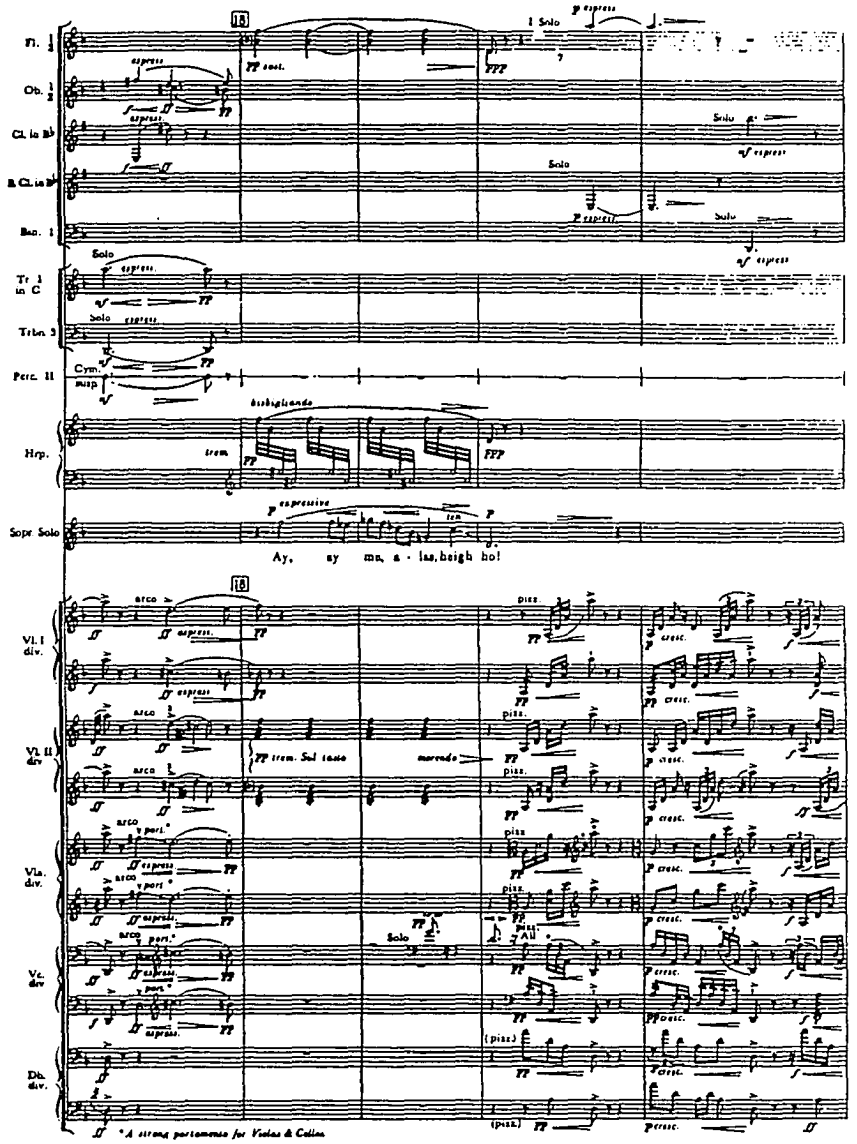
[58]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," Britten Companion, 398.

Example 23, part 1: "Messalina," mm. 1-5



Example 23, part 2: "Messalina," mm. 6-10



centering around F_5 on the words "ay me," forms a pattern which will be heard many times in this piece, either literally or in modified form. This pattern with its half-step descent on "me" sounds like a sigh of grief. The D^b in the vocal line further negates the D minor pitch focus of the opening measures. This straying from the original pitch center may correspond to Messalina's loss of emotional balance due to her intense grief. On the word "heigh-ho!" the voice sorrowfully and resignedly drops a major seventh, redirecting the harmony back to D minor. During the vocal phrase, the orchestra plays discreet pianissimo tremolos.

Measures 9-12 are a repetition of measures 1-7, but in rhythmically condensed form, ending in another statement of the motto theme. The voice enters in measure 12, again piano. The first half note of the vocal line is now broken up into two quarter notes with the added word "me," making this second expression of grief slightly more intense than the first.

Measures 14-22 are a third statement of the opening material intensified by increased rhythmic activity. Britten writes the motto theme again in measures 18-19. The vocal part enters for the third time with the lament in measure 19. This time the dynamic level in the voice is mezzo-forte, tapering as before to piano at the end of the phrase. The first part of the pattern is further

extended with the addition of more repeated Fs and further exclamations of "ay" in the voice part.

Measures 22-27 bring this first section to a close by combining the open fifth/fourth motive with the "ay me" motive. Measures 22-23 contain the empty open fifths between the notes A and D. In measures 24-25, the clarinet and bassoon pick up the theme first sung by the voice in measures 7-8. This time the pattern of half steps and whole steps is different. In the figure F-E-G-F, the half step is now between the first and second notes, rather than between the third and fourth notes of the pattern. In the sequence of notes C-B^{b}-D-C, there are no half steps, and the interval between B^{b} to D is a major, rather than a minor third.

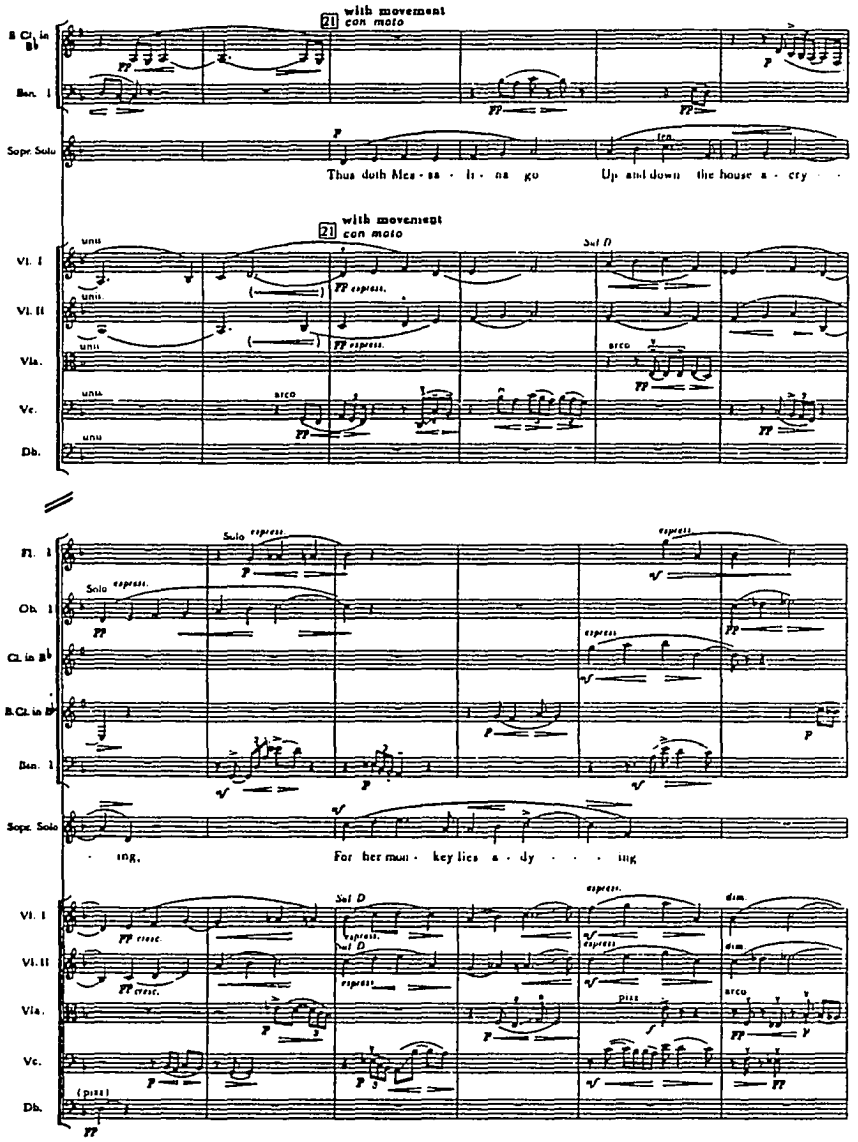
From here until the end of the movement the "ay me" motive will be played frequently in the orchestra. Britten continues to develop the motive by procedures such as changing the rhythm and adding notes to the end of the pattern (cellos, measure 28), adding notes to the beginning and end and expanding the intervallic content of the pattern (cellos, measure 35) and playing only the end of the pattern and then adding on notes (viola, measure 32).

In measures 24-26, Britten introduces a scalar pattern of four notes in the violin (A-B^{b}-C-D) which foreshadows the scalar quality of the vocal melody which

follows (this figure is related to the scalar patterns of the song "Rats Away!," but the notes have much longer rhythmic values here). The voice picks up the scalar pattern on the note D and continues it in measures 27-31 (Example 24).

As with the motive on the words "ay me," the arrangement of half-steps and whole-steps in the scalar pattern is sometimes modified. In measures 27-35, the voice part climbs by step, sometimes dipping down only to begin the step-wise ascent again, as in the last beat of measure 27 and on the last half of the fourth beat of measure 29. There is an aural allusion to the motto theme in measures 29-30 and 33-34 beginning with the descents of a fifth. In measure 31 and in measure 35, the voice part falls a fifth at the end of the phrase, echoing the falling sevenths of "heigh-ho!" in measures 8-9, 13-14 and 21-22 and effectively setting the feminine ending of the lines of text. The first and second violins have similar lines which tend to rise by step, fall back down and then rise again in a stepwise manner. The voice and the two violin parts do not always sound in unison, however. Sometimes there are dissonant clashes when one part is ahead of the other by a step, such as with the two violin parts in measure 33. Sometimes different parts state the same notes in different rhythms (heterophony), such as the voice and first violin in measure 29 or the voice and

Example 24: "Messalina," mm. 25-36



second violin in measure 33. In measure 34, the first violin takes over the doubling of the voice, but only for three and a half beats.

In measure 37, recalling the opening of the song, a muted brass fanfare of open fifths enters, this time on the notes A^{b} and E^{b}. Measure 38 begins with an orchestral chord of open fifths, now on $F^{\#}$ and $C^{\#}$. The voice enters forte on an $F^{\#}$ on the significant word "Death." On the line "Death, thou art too cruel," the voice part descends, rather than ascends, in a scalar manner. Britten sets "To bereave her of her jewel" in ascending fourths and descending fifths in the voice part, recalling the dropping fifth of earlier melodic fragments in this section. In measure 40, the oboes echo the voice part from measures 33-35. The cellos, violas, bassoon, bass clarinet and first oboe play variants of the "ay me" motive between rehearsal [22] and rehearsal [23].

The brass once more play a fanfare in open fifths in measure 41-42, this time on the notes $F^{\#}$ and $C^{\#}$ and the notes E and B. In measures 43-45, the voice sings the motive of a falling second (the second half of the "ay me" motive, but here a major, instead of a minor, second) five times. The first flute doubles the voice while the second flute plays different notes underneath the A-G melody each time.

In measures 47-53, the voice and orchestra continue to rise stepwise. The cello, clarinet, and bassoon play the "ay me" motive. More open fifths between A and D in the brass and harp followed by a horn glissando usher in an open fifth in the orchestra between E^b and B^b in measure 54.

This is the horn glissando that Britten indicated in his program notes as the high point in the piece. The voice enters in measure 54 on a high B^b on the word "Fie." This ushers in an amazing passage for the voice from measures 54-67.

In this passage, the singer, repeating the word "fie" 33 times, gradually descends from B^b_5 in measure 54 to G_3 in measure 65 - if the lower option is taken - and ends on the repeated note D_4 in measures 65-67 (marked morendo) as Messalina exhausts herself with her violent crying. Christopher Palmer calls the repeated Ds a "vocal imitation of a drumbeat."[59] Donald Mitchell writes, ". . . an extravagant cadenza on the word - no, the sound - "Fie," represents the innovative vocal style that is characteristic of Our Hunting Fathers.[60] The passage begins at the mezzo-forte dynamic level and ends on a

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[59]Christopher Palmer,"The Orchestral Works," Britten Companion, 398.

[60]Donald Mitchell, "Our Hunting Fathers: Abroad and at Home," in Britten and Auden, 42.

dynamic lower than piano, probably actually pianissimo. There are many expressive dynamic variations within this gradual decrescendo. There are some crescendi over the course of one or two beats (measures 56, 58, 59 and 62), but the prevailing pattern is that of a louder attack followed by a decrescendo on the word "fie," imitating the sound of a sigh (Example 25).

Stephen Banfield calls this cadenza "excessive but wholly structural," since it is an elaboration of the motto theme.[61] The voice part in this passage consists partly of repeated descending triads. These triads are the beginning of the cycle's motto theme which the voice sings in its original form in measure 59 (rehearsal 25), in the version which begins with a descending minor triad in measures 58 and 62, and in an elaborated version with added chord tones over a greater range ending on an $F^{\#}$ - enharmonic to G^{b} - in measures 56-57.

String and woodwind chords, often in high register, accompany the voice in measures 54-65. These chords are not triadic, but often contain open fifths. The motto theme is stated in the keys of E^{b} major/minor (measures 54-56), B minor (measures 57-58), A^{b} major/minor (the first two beats of measure 59), E minor (the last half of measure 59-the first two beats of measure 62), $C^{\#}$ major

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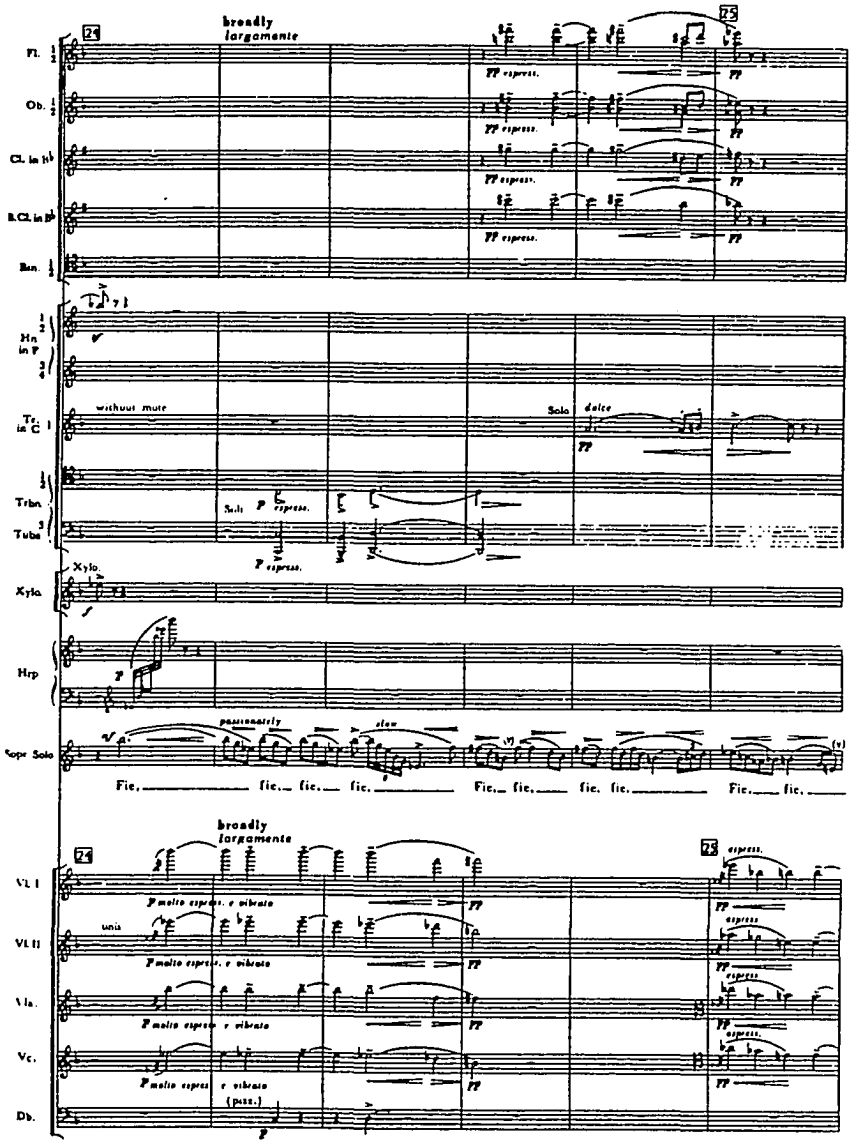
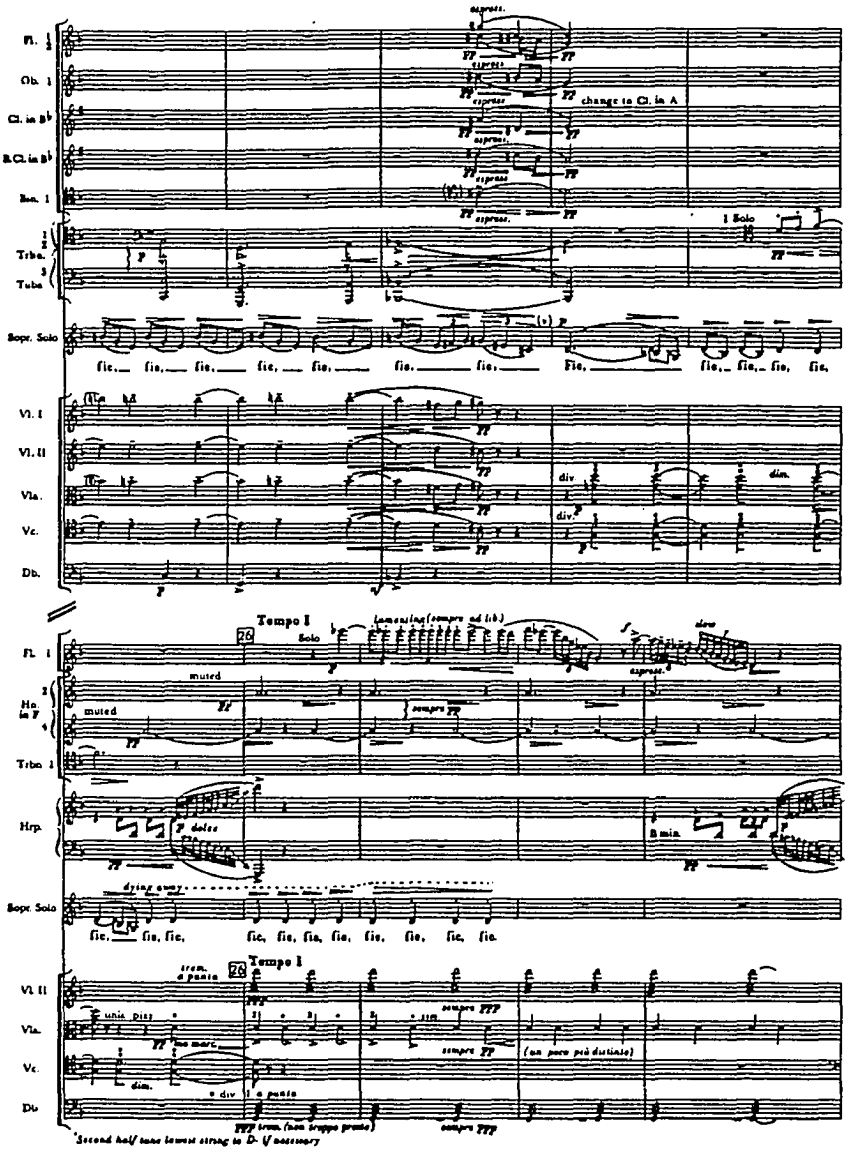
[61]Stephen Banfield, Sensibility and English Song, 385.

Example 25, part 1: "Messalina," mm. 54-59



Example 25, part 2: "Messalina," mm.60-69



(the last two beats of measure 62), and G minor (measures 63-65) - the appearances of the motive in C$^{\#}$ major and G minor include only the first falling triad. All of these occurrences of the motive are linked together in that, generally, the last note of the motive becomes the first note of its next transposed statement. With the exception of the G minor passage, the sequence of keys follows a pattern of descent by a major third and then a minor third, followed by a major third and by a minor third again (or their enharmonic equivalents).

The voice part often contains accents which seem to contradict the meter, such as the cross rhythms in measures 55-56 and 60-61. The voice and orchestra sometimes state the same notes slightly out of rhythmic alignment (again, a simple form of heterophony), as in measure 62 and in the last beats of measures 56 and 58. In measures 55-56, the first three notes of the "ay me" motive are played on the trombone and tuba. In measures 60-62, a modified and truncated version of the motto theme is played on these same instruments.

The last section of the piece begins in measure 66 (rehearsal [26]). In measures 66-67, the viola and horn double the obsessive repeated Ds of the voice part. A dissonant E^{b} is repeated in short note values on the solo flute, however. This E^{b} burgeons into the "ay me" motive at the end of measure 67 and the beginning of measure 68.

This motive is taken up and expanded upon by various wind instruments in expressive solo passages to the end of the piece: the oboe in measures 70-73, the horn and bassoon in measure 73, the A clarinet in measures 74-76 and the bassoon in measure 77. Christopher Palmer has pointed out that "each [solo is] exquisitely disclosed by a soft harp glissando, as it were drawing aside a veil."[62] The harp glissandi of which Palmer writes occur in measures 65-66, measures 69-70, measures 73-74, measures 76-77, and measures 77-78.

The orchestration of the postlude of "Messalina" has drawn much comment from musicologists. Peter Evans writes:

> The original form of [the motto theme] provides a fine sweep of impassioned line at the climax, obsessive in its reiterations yet roaming wildly in its tonal course. [In] the orchestral coda that sublimates this cry . . . like Mahler, Britten here produces some of his most luminous effects from what appears to be a chamber orchestra of soloists, but in fact is dependent for all its subtler shadings on the resources of a full orchestra.[63]

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[62]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," Britten Companion, 398.

[63]Peter Evans, The Music of Benjamin Britten, 71.

Donald Mitchell writes:

> so intense is the release of grief in the vocal cadenza, that it has to be wound down through a sequence of cadenzas for solo wind . . . with each cadenza unerringly imagined for the character of the instrument as it surfaces with its own version of Messalina's lamenting. For its time, a daring approach to scoring for an orchestra of soloists, at least part of which Britten had learnt from Mahler.[64]

Michael Kennedy also compares this music to that of Mahler.

> In "Messalina" the extravagance of the verbal expression of mourning is matched by an instrumental accompaniment to the voice's almost baroque lamentations which finds fullest expression in the subsequent orchestral interlude. Here there is no hint of satire as Britten expresses genuine pathos by a Mahlerian subtlety in obtaining the most transparent effects of shading and colour from the players. In the woodwind's rhapsodizing we can hear [an] "atmospheric" lyricism . . .[65]

In measures 78-84, marked rubato and legato ed espressivo sempre, a line similar to that of the vocal line from rehearsal [24] to rehearsal [26] is played on the alto saxophone. Like that vocal line, this alto saxophone line features the motto theme, sometimes in fragments and

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[64]Mitchell, "Our Hunting Fathers," in Britten and Auden, 42.

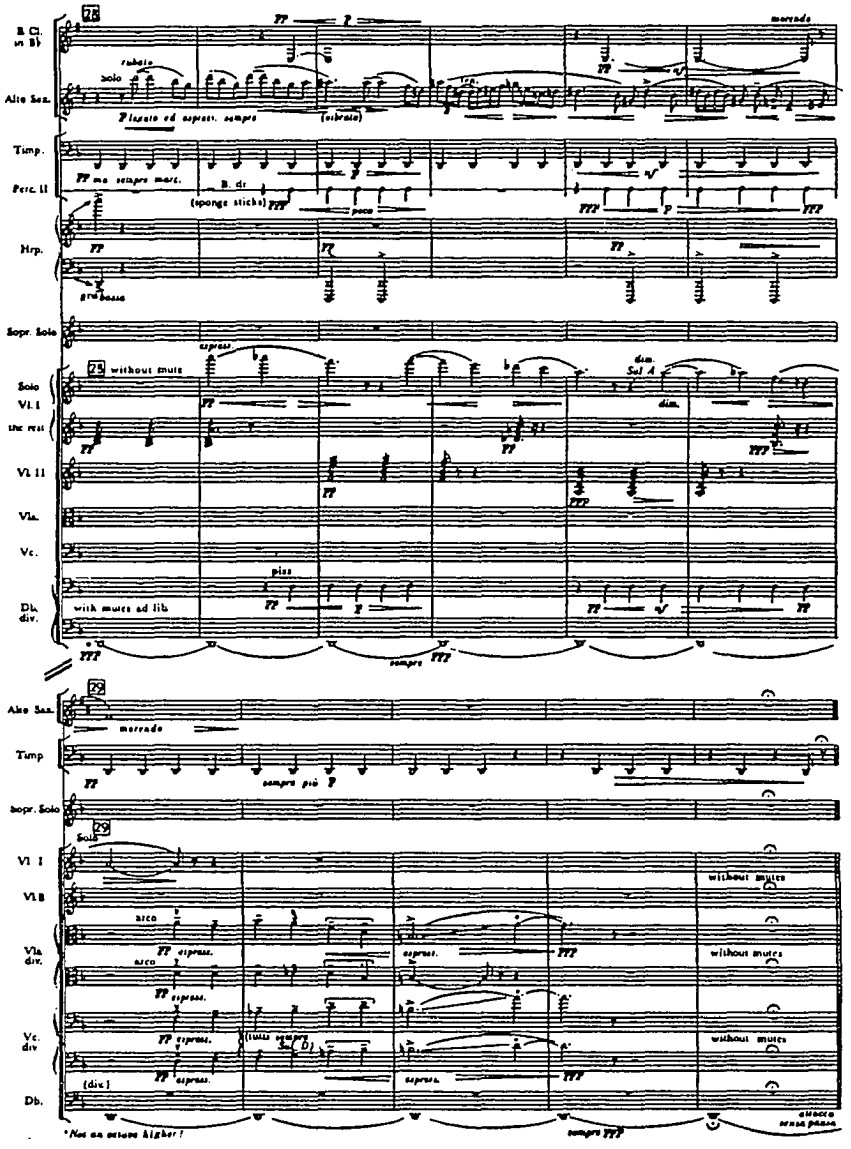
[65]Kennedy, Britten, 137.

variations. It also gradually descends in a similar matter, implying different tonalities as it does so: B^{b} major in measures 78-79, $F^{\#}$ minor in measure 80 and the first half of measure 81, E^{b} major in the second half of measure 81, B minor in measure 82 and the first half of measure 83, and G minor in the second half of measure 83. In measures 79-84, the concertmaster plays a solo espressivo line which descends through two octaves and in which the downward movement is sometimes stepwise and sometimes by thirds.

From measure 63 until the end of the piece, the note D (possibly connoting the concept of death) is constantly restruck in the strings (at various times in the viola, cello and bass) as a pedal tone. This D pedal is also maintained in the horn in measure 65-77 and in the timpani in measure 78 to the end. From rehearsal [26] to rehearsal [28] ,the Ds are struck on every beat of the measure in the viola, and from rehearsal [28] until three measures before the end, by the timpani. The timpani rests on the last beat of measure 86, the first beat of measure 87, the first and third beats of measure 88, and on the last eighth note of the last measure. The effect is that of a heart slowing down and then ceasing to beat (Example 26).

At measure 85, only the strings and timpani are left. In measures 84-85, the first violas play the "ay

Example 26: "Messalina," mm. 78-88



me" motive. They are accompanied by a rising scalar passage in thirds in the cellos divisi. The sonority on the downbeat of measure 86 is that of a G major 6/4 chord. This, however, does not resolve in a conventional manner to a D major chord. It simply dies away, leaving the D pedal in the string basses and the timpani. This note is carried over into the beginning of the fourth song, "Dance of Death."

Dance of Death

Britten's program note for this piece reads:

> [C] Dance of Death (Hawking for the Partridge) - [Prestissimo vivace] The soprano runs rapidly through the names of most of the birds concerned in this hunt, interspersing it often with the cry "whurret!" The orchestra takes this to a climax. A sudden outburst from the trombones is the first indication that all is not as well as it might be. However with an effort the orchestra recovers, and the soloist launches into a hearty song - "Sith sickles and the shearing scythes!" At a climax the roll-call is again called [sic], but once more the trombones interrupt. Something depressing appears to have happened, as the succeeding passage is of a wailing nature, with sad "whurrets" for the clarinet, and dismal 3rds in the bassoons - perhaps a bird has been hurt. But after another bang the movement continues with additional energy, and a big climax follows with a much extended version of "Sith sickles" on the trumpet and wood-wind. "Well flown, eager kite!" is sung exultantly by the soloist. At this everyone falls to dancing a merry folk measure, but the trombones interrupt again and with a string glissando the movement proceeds with more desperation than before - the soloist is left far behind. The trombones continue with their interruption and eventually overwhelm everyone. The percussion maintains an exhausted roll; vain efforts are made to restart the movement: but the

> death is sounded by the muted brass. A "whurret!" from the top of the soloist [sic] to the bottom of the double-basses finishes the movement.[66]

Although the subject of "Dance of Death" is ostensibly hunting, writers, as we have seen, have often associated hunting with human desire and violence. We also remember that Britten, when he was writing this cycle, was concerned with news reports of violence in Ethiopia and Spain, including the bombing of cities and the slaughter of children. One also remembers his joking comment that he was afraid of crashing or of inhaling mustard gas, which the Italians dropped from planes in Ethiopia, when flying to Barcelona. He also was himself exposed to the threat of being bombed as a child during World War I. In another song cycle, Who Are These Children?, written in 1969, Britten treats the subject of aerial bombing.[67] Britten may also have been thinking of this topic when he wrote "Dance of Death": the kites of the song may have had the second, symbolic identity of aerial bombers. When one hears the orchestral interlude near the end of the piece (measures 284-390) one cannot

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[66]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 444-45.

[67]Donald Mitchell, note, Letters, vol. 1, 439; Benjamin Britten, Who Are These Children?: Lyrics, Rhymes and Riddles by William Soutar, for Tenor and Piano, Op. 84, score (London: Faber Music, 1972).

help thinking of the violence, actual and potential, which engulfed Europe at the time.

If hunting is linked with war, then hawking, which involves falcons swooping down from the air onto their prey, reminds one especially of a frightening type of warfare new to the twentieth century: bombing of targets from airplanes. Even when the targets of these bombings were ostensibly military, they often resulted in large death tolls for civilians. In the tense climate in Europe of the 1930s, people worried about the potential destructiveness of air power. In 1932, English Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin said,

> I think it is well . . . for the man in the street to realize that there is no power on earth that can protect him from being bombed. Whatever people may tell him, the bomber will always get through . . . .[68]

In 1936, the year of the composition of Our Hunting Fathers, a prophetic movie named Things to Come, based on H. G. Wells's book, The Shape of Things to Come, was released, in which a European city named "Every town" was destroyed by aircraft bombers on Christmas Eve.[69]

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[68]Keith Robbins, Munich 1938 (London, 1968), 89-90; quoted in David Clay Large, Between Two Fires: Europe's Path in the 1930s (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1990), 319.

[69]Large, 320.

In 1937, the year after Our Hunting Fathers was written, these fears came true with the destruction of the town of Guernica, in Spain, during the Spanish Civil War. The bombing was perpetrated by the German Luftwaffe (Nazi Germany was in league with Franco's Nationalist forces). Interestingly, the planes were from the Condor Legion, named after a bird of prey. On April 26, 1937, German planes attacked the small town of Guernica, killing between 100 and 1600 civilians (reports vary widely).[70] Guernica was followed by the bombings of Coventry, Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Dresden in World War II.[71]

"Dance of Death" is the longest of the songs in Our Hunting Fathers. This movement is in 6/8, in the form of a tarantella, a traditional rhythm for hunting music.[72] The 6/8 rhythm is also often used for the scherzo movement of a symphony. The opera Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk by Shostakovich, which Britten heard around the time he was composing Our Hunting Fathers, may have had some influence on the song "Dance of Death." This opera contains violent, sardonic orchestral interludes very

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[70]Large, 224-260.

[71]Large, 266.

[72]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 399.

similar in character to the orchestral interlude near the end of "Dance of Death."[73]

This movement can be divided into sections corresponding to sections of the poem and marked by changes in melody, tempo, and orchestration. The first section, from measure 1 to measure 60, serves as an introduction. In it, the singer sings hunting cries and calls out the names of several of the birds to be used on the hunt. From measure 61 (rehearsal [33]) to measure 109 (rehearsal [37]) the voice sings a merry but grotesquely disjunct melody to the section of the poem from "Sith sickles and the shearing scythes" to "To truss you ever and make your bale our bliss." From rehearsal [37] to rehearsal [38] the pitch class $F^{\#}$ is emphasized as the voice recites names of hunting birds on $F^{\#}_{5}$. The measures from rehearsal [38] to rehearsal [39] are transitional to the new section that begins at rehearsal [40]. In these transitional measures, the descent of the orchestral registration sets up a lower tessitura in the voice part at rehearsal [40]. At rehearsal [40], the tempo slows down, and the singer continues the roll-call of birds. At measure 179 (one measure after rehearsal [42]) the tempo begins to recover for more hunting cries and names of birds in the text. At rehearsal [43] the tempo is back to

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[73]Mitchell, "What Do We Know about Britten Now?" in The Britten Companion, 33-38.

the opening vivace for more birds' names. At the end of this section the kites fell the partridge. At measure 246 (rehearsal [46]) the tempo slows down for another short orchestral interlude. In measure 265, the voice re-enters. From rehearsal [48] (measure 272) to measure 283 (rehearsal [49]), the voice sings a melody on the words starting with "We falconers thus make sullen kites" to the end of the poem. From measure 284 to measure 388 the voice is silent during a lengthy orchestral interlude. At measure 389 (rehearsal [58]) the tempo changes to Lento. In measure 391, the voice enters with repeated text from earlier in the poem which includes the meaningful juxtaposition of two names originally separated by many lines of text, "German" and "Jew." The movement ends quietly with a falling pizzicato bass line. A more detailed analysis of the piece begins in the next paragraph.

"Dance of Death" starts with the pedal note D1 in the string bass, carried over (attacca senza pausa) from "Messalina" - one half of the string bass section was told to tune their lowest strings down a whole step, if necessary, in the previous movement at rehearsal 26. The voice enters with the first eight names from the roll-call of hunting birds and the cries "whu-r-r-r-r-ret!" (sometimes abbreviated to "r-r-r-ret!"), "hey dogs," and "ware haunt hey!" The voice begins pianissimo and sotto

voce, immobile, on D_4. The names "Duty, Quando, Travel, Jew" and "Beauty, Timble, Trover, Damsel" are sung in a bouncy quarter note-eighth note rhythm. These words abound in explosive consonant sounds: d, t, k (at the beginning of "Quando"), and b. The word "Jew" has only one syllable, setting it apart from the rest of the names, which have two syllables each (Example 27).

In measure 9, the voice sings the first hunting cry, "whu-r-r-r-r-ret!" The vocal line begins pianissimo and jumps a ninth from D_4 to E_5 for the second syllable, which is accented. The pitch E_5 serves as an aural link with the same reciting tone at rehearsal [30]. The cross-hatches on the stem of the note and the repeated r's indicate that the singer should make a short vowel sound and close quickly to a trilled r. This, writes Peter Pears, is to indicate the huntsman whistling at the dogs or birds through his teeth.[74] The singer continues with the repetition of the first eight names, interspersed at various points with the hunting cries. The cries are inserted in an uneven pattern, with varying numbers of measures in between, similar to the irregular insertion of the word "Rats!" in the final section of "Rats Away!"

Britten sets the cry "Hey dogs hey!" to the disjunct melodic pattern E_5-A_5-B_4, which brings the voice

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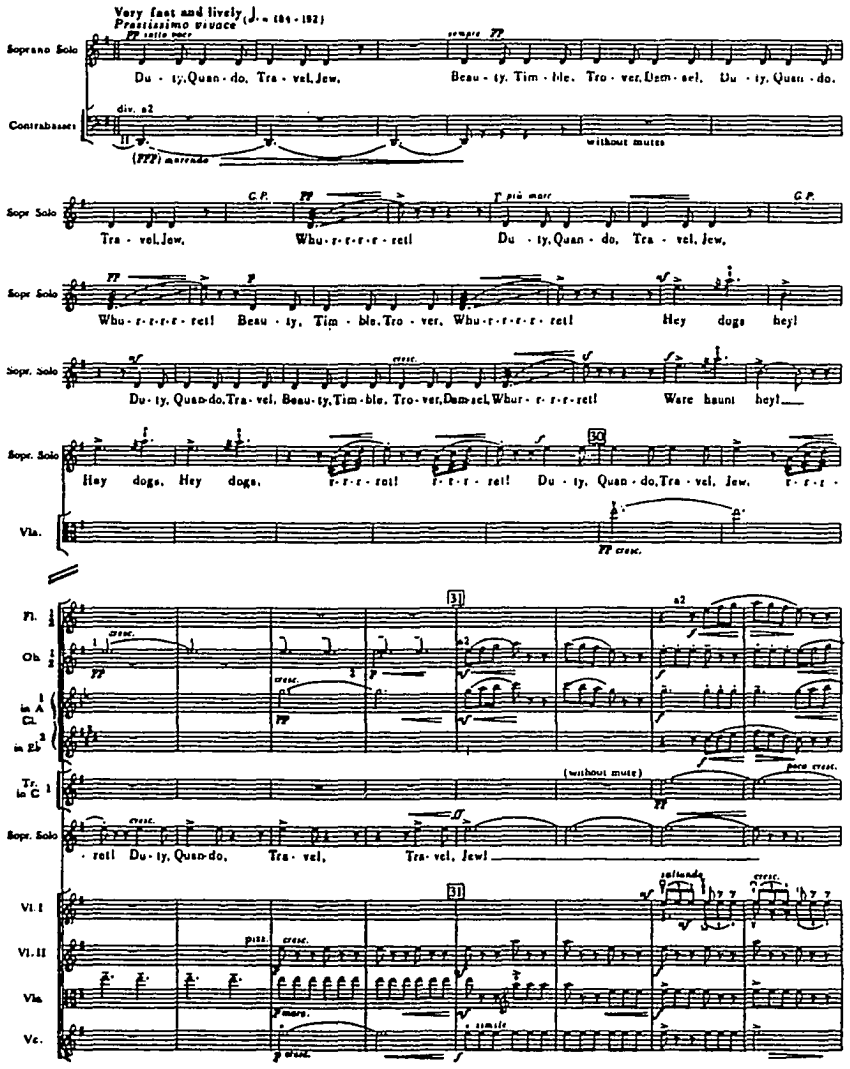
[74]Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 62.

Example 27: "Dance of Death," mm. 1-43



to its highest pitch yet in the song. The melodic intervals in this pattern are an ascending perfect fourth followed by a descending minor seventh. The final note, B_4, is a fourth below the first note, E_5. If the three notes were stacked vertically, a chord built on fourths would result. The high pitch, the grace note on "dogs," and the accents on all three notes realistically convey the impression of a hunter calling his animals. This same motive is truncated to two notes in the call "hey dogs" in measures 29-30. The perfect fourth, we recall, is also the interval usually traversed by the ascending scalar motive which appears throughout the cycle and especially in this piece. Britten uses a modified form of the scalar motive which has a minor third between the first two notes (A_4-C_5-D_5-E_5) in the voice part in measures 31-33 and 35-36. The singer now declaims the names of the birds in measures 33-43 on E_5, a ninth above D_4 where they were sung before. These same two notes, D_4 and E_5, a ninth apart, earlier comprised the cry "whurret!" in measures 9-10, 14-15, 17-18, and 25-26.

The D pedal in the string bass continues up through the first eighth note of measure 4. From this point up until measure 34 the voice sings without orchestral accompaniment. When the orchestra enters in measure 34 it is on the note E_5 repeated in the strings and oboe. At

the word "Jew" the oboe and clarinet in A play the four-note scalar theme up (measure 40) and down again (measure 41). The abrupt change in orchestral melodic material places the word "Jew" in striking relief. Britten accents the word "Jew" in the voice part with dynamics and duration. In measures 40-43, the singer holds out the word "Jew" for three measures plus an eighth note. The dynamic level for the attack on the word "Jew" is fortissimo. This was prepared by a crescendo starting in measure 36. Britten also wrote an accent at the beginning of this note in measure 40. There is an additional crescendo on the note in measure 42 (Example 28). Up until measure 50 (rehearsal [32]) the orchestra plays this theme ascending (E-F$^{\#}$-G-A) and descending (A-G-F$^{\#}$-E). The horn, an instrument traditionally associated with hunting, loudly calls everyone to the hunt in a variant of the scalar theme with a minor third between the first and second notes (A-C-D-E), which the voice sang in measures 31-33 and 35-36 (measures 44-49). At rehearsal [32] (measure 50) the trombones play an F **ffz**, which is unexpected, suddenly following the A-E-F$^{\#}$-G sonority of the last three measures (Example 27). This is the first of several trombone blasts which interrupt the piece at various points (rehearsal [38], [42], [46], [49], [50], [51], [52], [53], [54] and [55]) on pitches dissonant to the

previous sonorities, suggesting that, as Britten writes, "all is not as well as it might be."

The voice enters in measure 56 on E_5, continuing the same reciting pitch as before. The singer starts at pianissimo, gradually expressing her excitement poco a poco crescendo to a forte on "sickles" in measure 61.

Then ensues what Peter Pears calls a savage "parody [of] the traditional A-hunting-we-will-go type of melody."[75] The markings at rehearsal [33] are con anima and giocoso e con forza. Both voice and accompaniment are tonally unstable, moving through many keys, adding to the sense of the grotesque.

The brief orchestral interlude at rehearsal [34] leads to a varied restatement at rehearsal [35] of the previous vocal phrases of rehearsal [33]. The material at rehearsal [36] is analogous to that at rehearsal [34], except that the voice now continues the orchestral material with its own return of "Hey dogs hey!"

The voice line in this section, from rehearsal [33] to rehearsal [36], contains many disjunct intervals. As Pears writes, "The vocal line lurches extravagantly

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[75]Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 62.

through its compass."[76] The effect is Dionysian, of an abandonment of restraint and control. The melodic pattern of a rising perfect fourth plus a falling minor seventh which Britten had originally set to "hey dogs hey!" in measures 19-20 is repeated down a step in measures 63-64 on the words "shearing scythe" and up a step in measures 102-5 on the words "Hey dogs hey!" and "Ware haunt hey!" Interestingly, the highest note in measures 63-64 is on the second syllable of "shearing," which should be the least accented of the three syllables in the two words "shearing scythe." This confirms Pears's contention that here the music and the overall mood of the text are more important than the setting of the individual words.[77] This motive also appears on a lower pitch level for "all their flights" in measures 86-87 and on the words "and make your" in measures 95-96. There are other places in the vocal line where the intervallic content of this motive is modified but the general shape remains, such as "Hath shorn the" and "fields of late" in measures 64-66, "hawks and we" in measures 70-71, "Dame Part(ridge)" in measures 73-74 and "never miss" in measures 89-90. Literal and modified versions of this motive are also

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[76]Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 62.

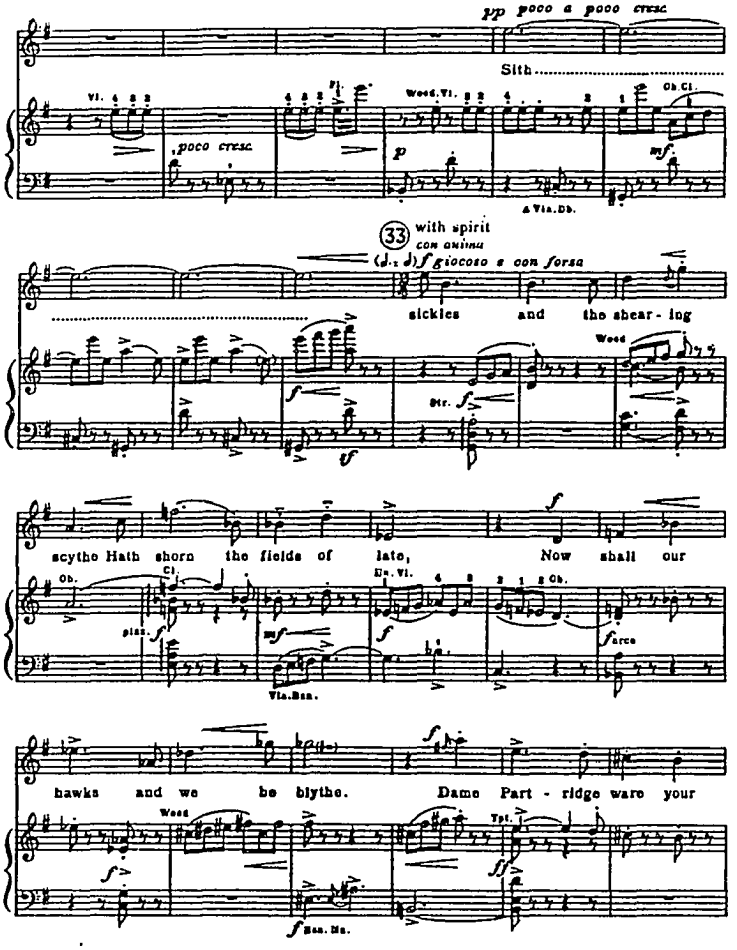
[77]Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Benjamin Britten: A Commentary, 62.

played in the orchestra at measures 67-68 (G_3-B^b_3-C_2), 72-73 (F_3-B^b_3-B_2), measures 95-96 ($G^\#_5$-$C^\#_6$-D_5, measures 98-99 (B_5-E_6-$F^\#_5$), measures 100-1 (A_4-D_5-E_4) and measures 135-36 (F_2-B^b_2-C_2). In measures 79-82, the motive becomes self-perpetuating, giving rise to a series of interlocking fourths and sevenths in the winds and strings. The ascending fourth sometimes appears by itself, as in "we be blythe" in measures 71-72 (Example 28).

Britten uses the related ascending scalar motive which fills in the ascending fourth frequently in the voice part and orchestra in this section, and, indeed, throughout most of the song. The connection between the two motives is made clear when they appear in conjunction, as in measure 63 or measure 71. In both these measures, the voice sings the ascending melodic fourth while the flute and clarinet in A fill in the fourth with the intervening scale tones. Sometimes Britten uses the modified form of the rising scalar motive with the interval of a minor third between the first and second notes, such as in measures 61-62 in the viola and second violin. He also writes the descending scale traversing a fourth, as in measure 68 in the first horn and first violin. In measures 92-95, in the voice part, the rising scalar figure is augmented into quarter notes.

Britten also uses the interval of the perfect fourth in this section harmonically, along with its

Example 28: "Dance of Death," mm. 52-75



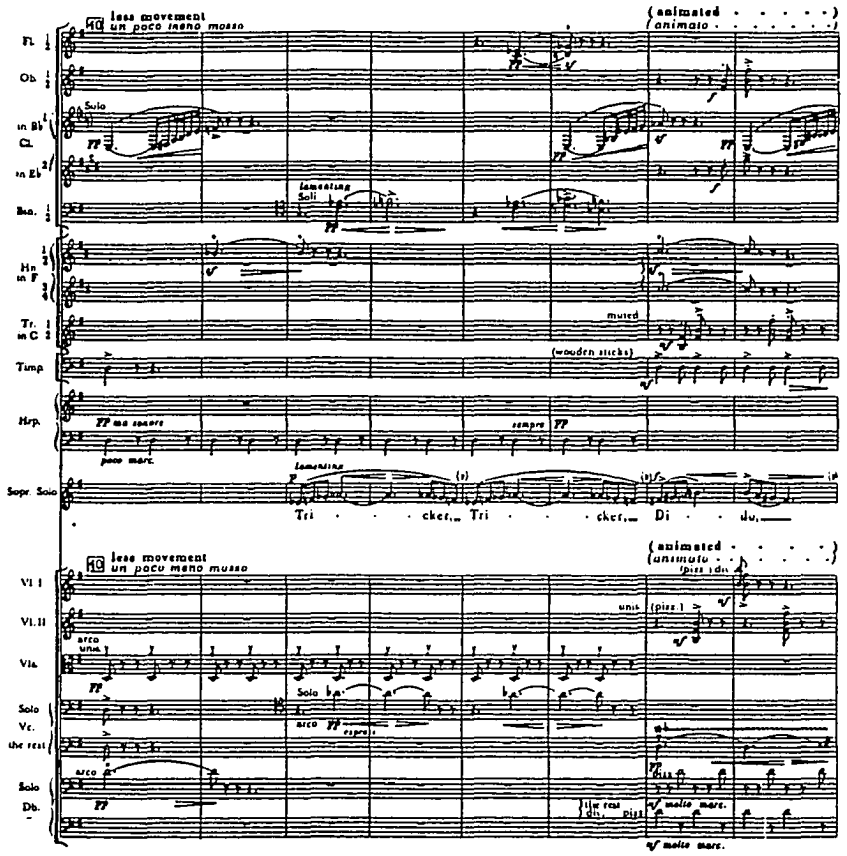
inversion, the perfect fifth. These intervals, we recall, were very important in "Messalina" as well. Two pairs of open fifths can be found in measures 88 and 89. In measure 65, the pairs of A-E and B^{b}-F imply A major/minor against B^{b} major/minor, a conflict which includes two semitonal clashes.

At rehearsal [37] the hunter resumes the roll call. In measures 1-24 of the movement, the names of the birds had been sung on D_4. In measures 33-43, they were sung on E_5. At rehearsal [37] (measure 110), Britten places them on $F^{\#}_5$, thereby indicating building excitement. At measure 126 the word "Quoy" is sustained on $F^{\#}_5$ with a crescendo much the same as the word "Jew" had been on E_5 in measures 40-43 to end the section.

An orchestral interlude begins at rehearsal [38]. Here the instruments go back to a piano dynamic and descend in register. At rehearsal [39] the orchestral texture has thinned considerably.

At rehearsal [40] a new section begins, un poco meno mosso. From here to rehearsal 44 the tempo changes several times. The singer calls out more names of birds in this section. Britten has indicated "lamenting" in measure 149. This is the section about which Britten writes in his program notes, "perhaps a bird has been hurt" (Example 29).

Example 29: "Dance of Death," mm. 147-54



Britten sets the names in this section to the four-note scalar patterns, rising and falling. The rhythms vary slightly from name to name. The four-note scalar figure is rife in the orchestra as well. The tonality from measure 147 (rehearsal [40]) to measure 190 fluctuates considerably. The vocal line implies a new

tonality every few measures with the calling of almost each new bird. The orchestra usually contradicts the tonality suggested by the voice part. For example, in measures 149-50 the voice sings E^b-F-G^b-A^b-G^b-F to the name "Tricker." The bassoons, however, accompany the A^b in the voice part with C-E^b in measure 149 and with D^b-F in measure 150. The implied harmonies, A^b major and especially D^b major, while tertian, contradict the E^b major tonality suggested by the voice part. From measure 147-77, however, a pedal point on D, played at various points in the bass, cello, viola, harp, and timpani, gives unity to the passage underneath the tonal ambiguity of the voice and other orchestral parts. This is analogous to the drone on C and G from rehearsal [37] to rehearsal 38. In measure 153, the tempo speeds up, and the dynamic level, which has been piano, turns forte - for the name "Dido." Then, in measure 155, for the name "Cherry," the dynamic level returns to piano and the tempo becomes slower again. At rehearsal [41] (measure 160), on the name Crafty, the tempo becomes animated and the dynamic becomes forte again. In measure 163, there is another subito piano and the tempo slows down once more. These tempo and dynamic changes convey a feeling of instability, of something indeed being wrong. At measure 179 there is another tempo change: subito animando, on the hunting cry "whurret, Let fly!" In measures 190-194, the voice,

starting at forte and making a crescendo, takes a rolled "r" up the $F^{\#}$ minor scale from $F^{\#}_4$ to $F^{\#}_5$ on the word "Whurret!" Christopher Palmer believes that the "sparely voiced harp chords" accompanying the voice here "suggest the hawks being released and speeding upwards through the air."[78]

From measure 190 to measure 221 the voice and accompaniment strongly point to $F^{\#}$ major. The voice part is marked fortissimo in the bright passaggio area of the voice between $C^{\#}_5$ and $F^{\#}_5$. The word "German" appears for the first time in this song in measures 219-20. It is preceded by the names "Minion," "Lemon" and "Courtier." Like the word "German," these three names are all sung at fortissimo and have accents on $C^{\#}$ and $F^{\#}$. "Minion," "Lemon" and "Courtier" are all sung on the pitch pattern $C^{\#}$-D-E-$F^{\#}$-($F^{\#}$)-E-D-$C^{\#}$. For the word "German," however, the D and E have been changed to $D^{\#}$ and $E^{\#}$. Britten further highlights the word "German" by repeating it and placing an exclamation point after it the second time. It is followed in the orchestra by a grotesque distortion of the hunting melody in the winds. The trumpet solo in measures 227-29 sounds crudely militaristic and overlaps with the next line of the text in the voice part, "O well flown" (Example 30).

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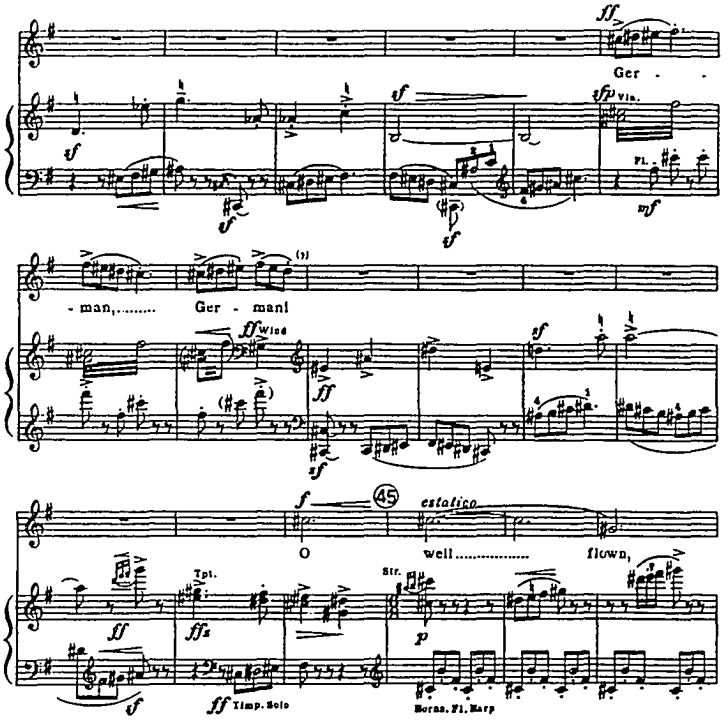
[78]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 399.

Example 30: "Dance of Death," mm. 214-231, piano score



The marking estatico at rehearsal [45] (measure 229) and the occurrence of "O well flown" three times at successively higher pitch levels convey a feeling of excitement and even ecstasy. Rising glissandi in the viola, first and second violin, harp, E^{b} clarinet, and flute in measure 240 prepare for an important climax in measure 241. At this point in the poem the partridge has been caught. The hunters instruct the falcons to circle above the prey ("Mark!"). The voice enters here fortissimo on a high $A^{\#}$. Over the course of the next six

measures the voice sings a modified version of the motto theme beginning with a $D^{\#}$ minor triad marked espressivo. Britten adds a tag of $D^{\#}_{5}$ and $A^{\#}_{4}$ at the end, making the voice descend an octave over the course of the passage, perhaps graphically depicting the bird being felled.

The next section, beginning at measure 249, is marked con parodia! : the exclamation point is Britten's. Measures 246-271 (from rehearsal [46] to rehearsal [48]) serve as an introduction to another short "a-hunting-we-will-go" melody in the voice part. Repeated staccato triplets in the flutes; tremolos in the flutes, clarinets, and voice; excited triangle and tambourine rhythms; the rising and falling scalar patterns; and familiar melodic fragments from earlier sections of the piece in the oboes and bassoons all build anticipatory excitement for the entrance of the melody in the voice at rehearsal [48]. The violin and viola solos in 253-54 and at rehearsal [47] (measures 260-61) consist mainly of open fifths and are marked "grotesque." The instruments in these solos sound as though they are tuning up their open strings, but are off-key; an F is substituted for an E in the violin, and a $C^{\#}$ is substituted for a C in the viola.

From rehearsal [48] to rehearsal [49] the voice sings an off-key drinking song. Again, Britten substitutes wrong notes, this time in the voice part: D natural for $D^{\#}$, G natural for $G^{\#}$ and $F^{\#}_{5}$ instead of the

anticipated E_5 at the end of the song fragment. The quarter note-eighth note rhythm is emphasized in the voice and orchestra, giving the passage a bouncy quality. The bassoon line leaps up and down chaotically. The effect is one of drunken, buffoonish revelry, insulting to the hunters. At measure 280 the vocal line veers out of control, with the hunting cry "whurret" sung eight times in a wild downward sequence, accelerando.

An orchestral interlude of large dimensions and incredible expressive power begins in measure 284 (one measure after rehearsal [49]). This interlude lasts until measure 391, two measures after rehearsal [58]. Although Britten has crafted the music very carefully with regard to thematic content and orchestration - "Scoring of this virtuoso calibre was unknown in England at the time"[79] - the effect in sound is one of mayhem and destruction. Christopher Palmer calls this passage

> the tremendous hurricane which breaks out during the second half of the movement, tearing all the orchestral themes up by the roots and flinging them into the fieriest furnace of symphonic development or distortion. . .[80]

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[79]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 399.

[80]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 399.

Peter Evans writes,

> In the interlude, a truly symphonic working-out of all the scherzo motives . . ., the implicit violence is given its head in a way that recalls Berg's use of interludes in Wozzeck.[81]

In this interlude, Britten breaks up and develops the melody "Sith sickles" which began in measure 56. The orchestra plays rising and falling four-note scales as well as melodic and harmonic perfect fourths as it has throughout the movement. Eighth-note chords and rhythms are sometimes repeated incessantly. The beat is sometimes divided into two parts (2/4) and sometimes into three (6/8). The dynamic level is generally quite loud, sometimes even **fff**, and the harmonic intervals are usually quite dissonant: major and minor seconds and sevenths abound. The horn, the instrument most strongly evocative of the hunt, is prominent in this orchestral interlude:

> The horns make the strongest impact, whether galloping with the tarantella motif, yelping excitedly and insistently with the dogs's halloo ("Hey dogs hey") or vanishing in the air in a mad flame-like streak of sound . . . As Britten knew, no instrument sounds in its high register quite as hysterical and uncontrolled as the horn; hence the murderously high tessiture [sic] in this movement.[82]

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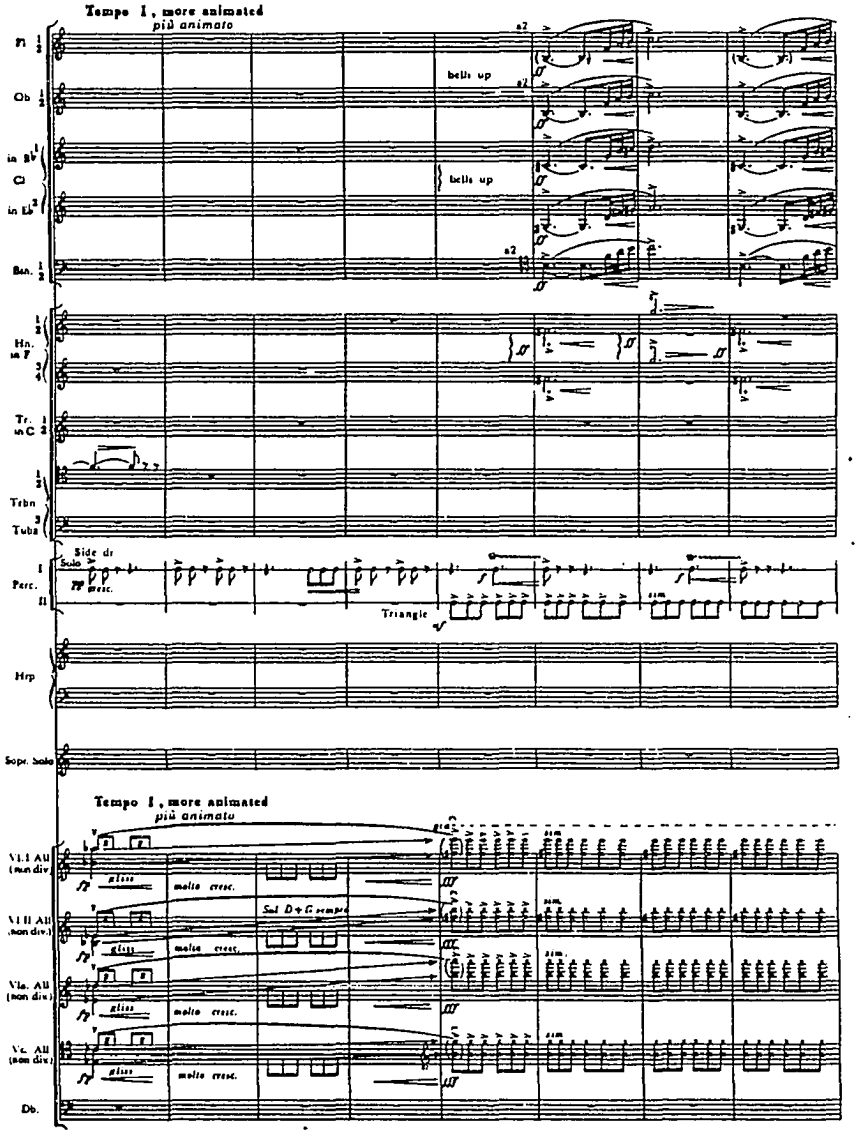
[81]Evans, "Music of Benjamin Britten," 72.

[82]Christopher Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 399.

The section begins at measure 284 with an eerily dissonant cluster of A^{b}-B^{b}-C^{b}-D^{b}-E^{b} in the strings, except for the basses, which are silent. Every part then moves up an octave plus a minor sixth in a glissando. The new cluster which results in measure 288 is E-$F^{\#}$-G-A-B. The strings play this cluster over and over obsessively on each eighth note of the next eight measures. The triangle joins them in this rhythm. Meanwhile the woodwinds play in unison the pattern B-F-A-B-C twice, in measures 289-290 and 291-292. The last four notes of this pattern are a modification of the four-note scalar motif. The horns join them on the first and last notes, B and C (Example 31).

The winds play a similar energetic upward pattern, evocative of physical activity and exultation, in measures 305-306. The horns play an extended version of the pattern with a glissando and more notes added to the scale in measures 315-317. In measures 292-293, the woodwinds play a grotesque distortion of the "Hey dogs, hey!" motive of a rising fourth and falling seventh: C_5-F_5-$F^{\#}_4$. In measures 294-295, it is abbreviated to the first two notes of the pattern only, in repetition. At this point, the woodwinds are playing in 2/4 while the strings and the triangle are in 6/8. The woodwinds play the rising fourths in duples again in measures 307-308, 311-314, and 318-321 (rehearsal [52]). The horns join the woodwinds

Example 31: "Dance of Death," mm. 284-291



with the complete "Hey dog, hey!" motive in measures 318-319 and the rising perfect fourths in measures 320-321.

In measures 297-301 (one measure after rehearsal [50]), the horns play the rising and falling four-note scalar motive, sometimes in unison and sometimes a major or minor second apart and with repetitions of the top and bottom notes of the figure. In measure 299, the addition of one more beat of eighth notes on E-F confuses the meter: it seems to add one more beat onto the previous measure, and the second beat of measure 299 seems to actually be the first beat of a new measure.

In measures 300-305, the strings play distorted versions of the "Sith sickles" melody. In measures 306-309, the winds play the "Hey dogs hey!" pattern. From rehearsal [51] to rehearsal [52], the violins restate the four-note scalar motive in a high register. Sometimes the first and second violins play in unison, but at other times they clash in half-step intervals. In this section, the clarinets, bassoon, violas, and cellos play the "Hey dogs hey!" motive of ascending perfect fourth and falling minor seventh, or the ascending fourth only. The trumpet plays an intervallically distorted version of the notes originally set to "hath shorn the fields of late" in measures 64-67 in measures 311-314.

From rehearsal [52] to rehearsal [55], the musical fabric is dominated by repeated eighth-note patterns in

the strings and woodwinds and wide melodic leaps in the harp, strings, clarinets, and bassoon. In measure 345-346, the second trumpet plays a descending fourth followed by two whole steps and a half-step descending: E_5-B_4-A_4-G_4-$F^{\#}4$. This pattern is related to that of a rising fourth plus a falling seventh which was originally sung to "Hey dogs hey!" in emphasizing the fourths between E_5-B_4-$F^{\#}_4$, albeit in a different order from the original motive. In this case, the B comes after the E, instead of vice versa, and the space between B and $F^{\#}$ is filled in stepwise. In the ensuing measures, up to rehearsal [55] (measure 354), the trumpets and horns play similar patterns in staggered entrances at different pitch levels. The woodwinds also play similar material in unison from measures 348-353 (rehearsal [55]). These descending fortissimo lines could be interpreted as a graphic representation of hawks descending on partridges, or of planes diving down to spray mustard gas on Ethiopian natives.

In measures 354 (rehearsal [55]) to 367, the orchestral texture is extremely dense and loud. Virtually all the instruments, with the exception of the trumpet, trombone, and most of the percussion section, play some variant of the four-note rising and falling scalar theme. In the strings, the highest and lowest notes of the pattern are sometimes repeated. The violins here are playing in a very high register, sempre ***fff***. The

timpanist plays a grueling repeated chromatic variant of the four-note scale ascending and descending in eighth notes from measure 357 to measure 371 (rehearsal [56]). The harp plays repeated glissandi up and down from D^{b}_{5} to B_{6}, in which the lowest dynamic level is ***fff***. In this climactic section, the trombones - historically associated with death - play a variant of the motto theme in measures 359-363, 365-368 and 369-371. The overall effect is one of violence and chaos. So strong is the impression that one is bound to think not only of hunting, but of the human violence which engulfed Europe in the 1930s and 1940s (Example 32).

At rehearsal [58], the orchestra enters on a unison D. The trombone and tuba glissando down to $G^{\#}$, a tritone away. The horns, however, sustain the D pianissimo as the voice re-enters in measure 391. Here the voice repeats some text heard earlier in the movement. In measure 392, Britten places together the names of the birds "German" and "Jew," which were originally far apart in the roll-call in the poem. The juxtaposition of these two words suggests another dimension to the piece: that is, that the Nazis are hunters and the Jews are the hunted.[83] Britten, we recall, had also highlighted the words "German" and "Jew" somewhat at earlier places in the song.

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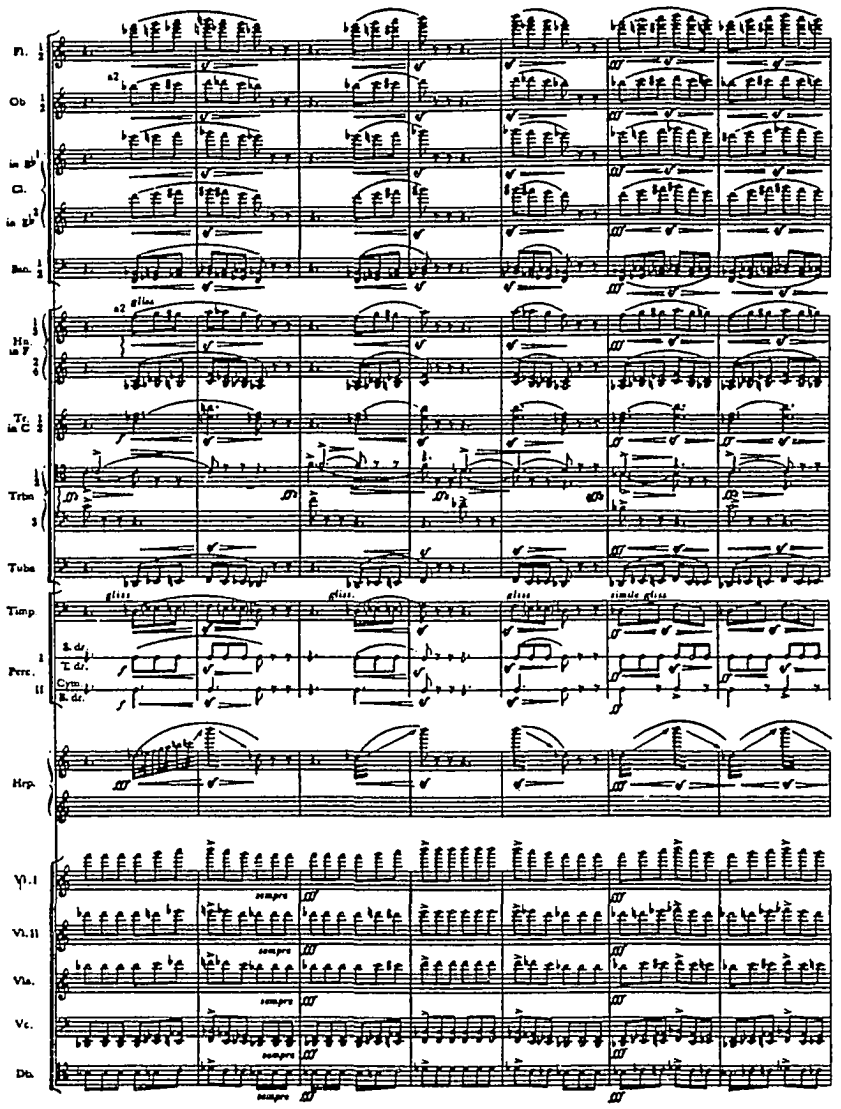
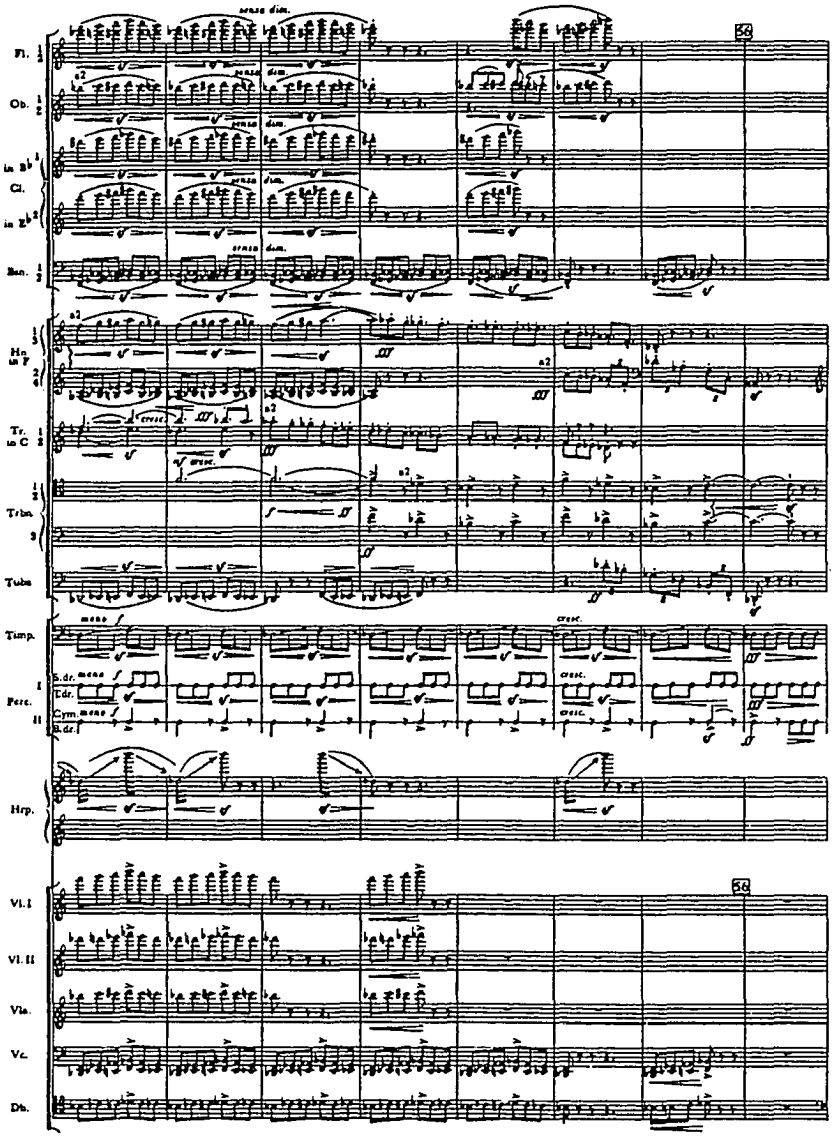
[83]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 47-48.

Example 32, part 1: "Dance of Death," mm. 356-362



Example 32, part 2: "Dance of Death," mm. 363-371



As Donald Mitchell points out, the juxtaposition of the names "German" and "Jew" "retrospectively illumines the fury of the preceding climactic orchestral passage." The point, says Mitchell,

> is almost too subtly made, and yet how powerful it is provided that it is heard as a last ghastly comment on the preceding dance of death. It is the moment - and the song - where public impingement is most dramatically registered in the cycle, where public comment takes over from private statement. The two names that are extrapolated from the litany and placed in sequence and in isolation are the names of the hunter and the hunted - German, Jew.[84]

Christopher Palmer believes that the political implications of the piece could have been an additional motivation for Britten's using the rhythm of the tarantella:

> Now that Donald Mitchell has pointed out that Our Hunting Fathers is deeply concerned with the rise of Fascism in Europe, and that the real subject of "Dance of Death" is not partridge-hawking but Jew-hunting, one wonders if Britten had in mind the old apocryphal association of the tarantella with the bite of the tarantula: perhaps to him the tarantella rhythm denoted pestilence, poison and destruction (the same moto perpetuo 6/8 recurs in the "Dance of Death" in the Sinfonia da Requiem).[85]

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[84]Mitchell, Britten and Auden, 47-48.

[85]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in The Britten Companion, 395-96.

This movement, which had begun so merrily, ends with a line implying D minor in the voice descending from A_5 to D_4, continuing down through the cellos and basses pizzicato, and ending on F_2, pianissimo, like a bird, wounded in flight, falling dead to the ground (Example 33).

Epilogue and Funeral March

Britten's program note for this movement is as follows:

> Epilogue and Funeral March - [Andante molto lento] A ghost of the hunting song on the xylophone appears at intervals. The soloist sings the words in a simple recitation, with fragmentary support from the orchestra. When the words "that human company" are reached the fragments gather into a broader theme for violins, which reaches a climax at the word "anonymous." The work finishes with a funeral march for the whole orchestra (brass and percussion muted, strings col legno and pizzicato) with fragments from other movements, and the ghost on the xylophone persisting to the end.[86]

Peter Pears writes of this movement,

> Of all these difficult songs, the last one is perhaps the most difficult. It needs first-class playing from every solo instrument, from xylophone and trombone to horn and violin. The words are scratchy and definitely un-bel-canto. But the composer is a match for them. Having decided on a

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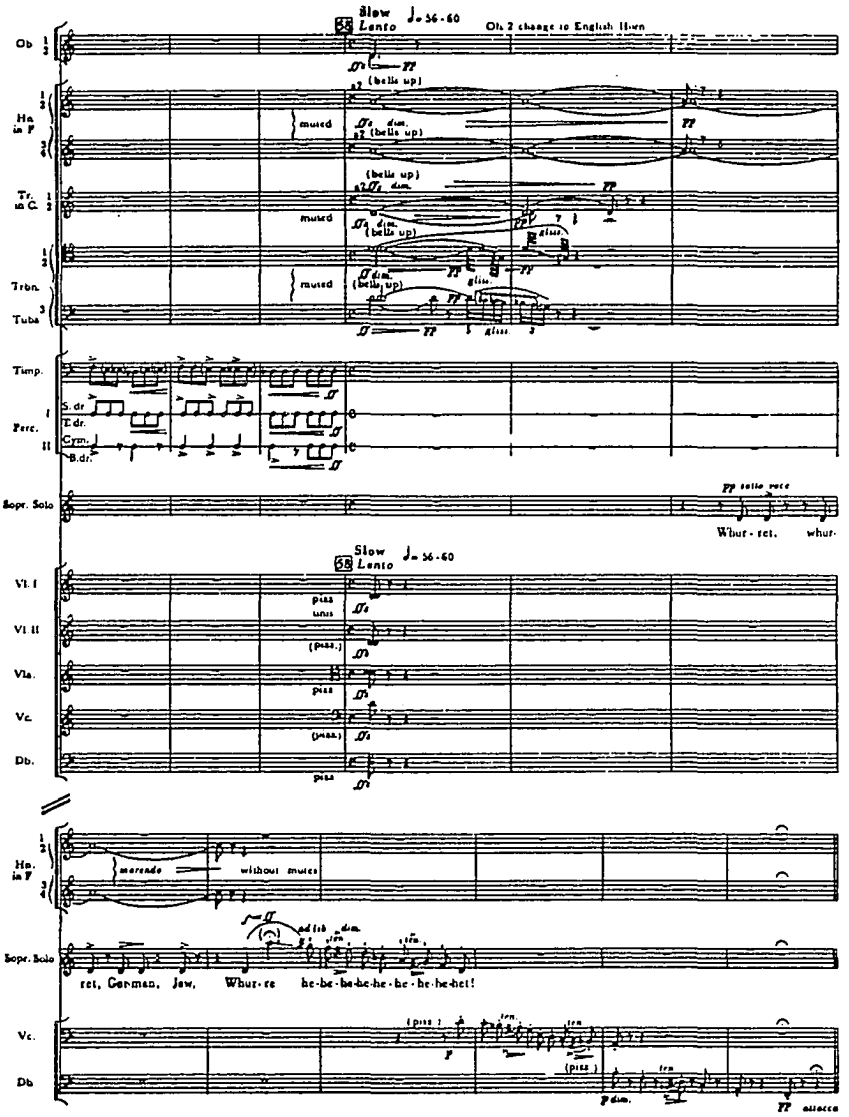
[86]Britten, Letters, vol. 1, 445.

Example 33: "Dance of Death," mm. 386-397



> Funeral March, he spaces the lines accordingly; the vocal line is a comment on the cryptic tune and rhythm. It takes some time to flower, and it is a sign of the times (1936) that the lines on which it chooses to flower are -
>
> That human company could so
> His southern gestures modify
> To [sic] make it his mature ambition
> To think no thought but ours,
> To hunger, work illegally,
> And be anonymous.
>
> In another decade "love" rather than "anonymous" would have been chosen for such an expansive melisma.[87]

The Epilogue, like the Prologue, is in 4/4. The dynamics for voice and orchestra are generally subdued. The beginning two measures for xylophone and strings are very rhythmic, almost mechanical, but when the voice enters in measure four, it is marked piano and parlante e molto rubato. Britten has written the orchestral parts in such a manner as to make the meter and rhythm very flexible when the voice is singing. At the same time, the orchestral accompaniment is more complicated in this piece than in the "Prologue," making matters of ensemble between the voice and the orchestra somewhat more difficult. A certain rhythmic flexibility must be maintained, however, in order to make the sung text seem natural and speechlike.

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[87]Pears, "The Vocal Music," in Britten: A Commentary, 63.

The orchestral texture of the "Epilogue" is rather sparse compared to that of the middle three movements. The descending chromatic motive, the rising diatonic scalar motive and the "ay me" motive appear frequently. Britten sometimes obsessively repeats or makes the line to center around a single note in the orchestra. The movement ends with a "Funeral March" for the orchestra alone. The cycle's motto theme returns in this section. Britten gives prominence to the pitch class C, but he also emphasizes the centers of D and $F^{\#}$, and the movement ends without convincing tonal closure, mirroring a lack of moral certainty about the relationship of humans to animals and to other human beings.

This movement may be divided, for the purpose of study, into five sections: the first from the beginning of the piece to rehearsal [61], which corresponds to the first stanza of Auden's text; the second from rehearsal [61] to rehearsal [64], which sets the second stanza of the poem; the third from rehearsal [64] to rehearsal [65] in which Britten recapitulates the opening line of text, "Our hunting fathers told the story"; the fourth from rehearsal [65] to rehearsal [66], in which Britten features the rising and falling four-note scale; and the fifth from rehearsal [66] to the end, marked alla marcia funebre, in which the motto theme of the cycle returns. A more

detailed analysis of this movement begins in the next paragraph.

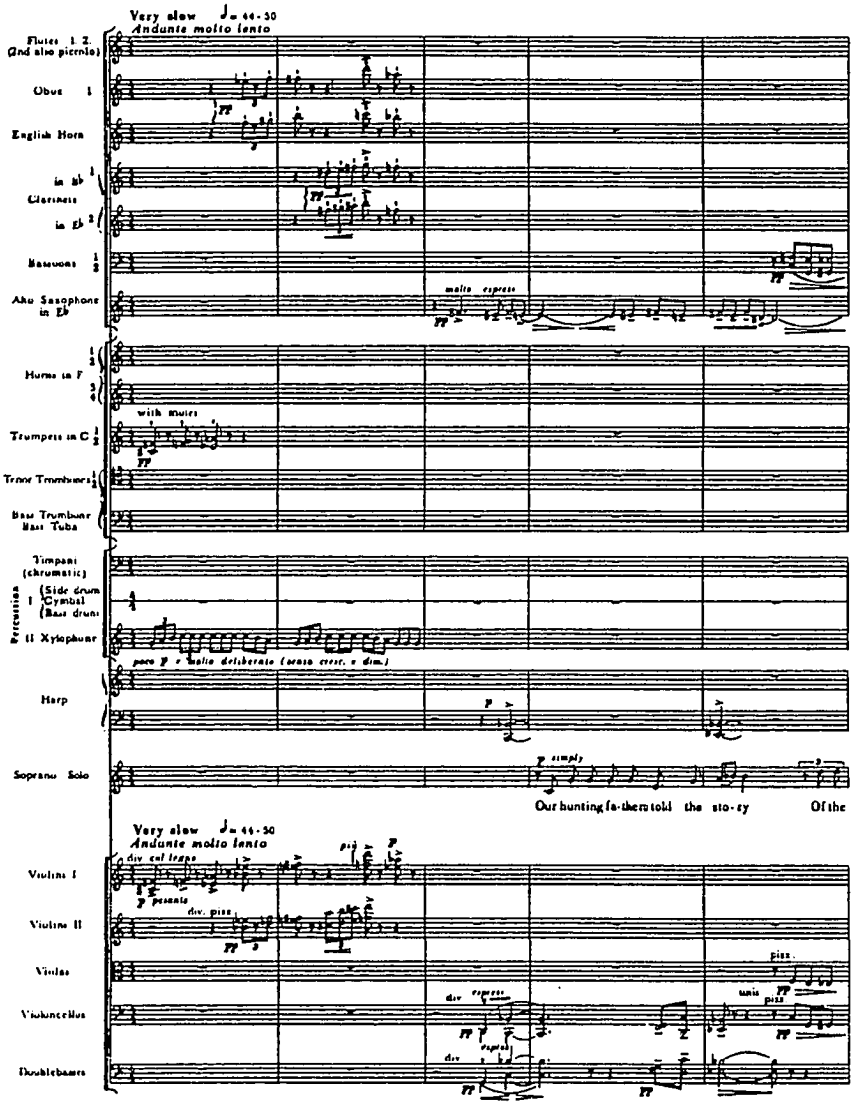
The first section of the movement, to rehearsal [61], sets the first stanza of Auden's poem, up through the line, "The rightness of a God." The orchestration for this stanza is rather dry and desolate. At the beginning of the movement the xylophone plays an ascending scalar figure. This is what Britten refers to in the program notes as the "ghost of the hunting song," since this figure was so prominent in "Dance of Death." This motive, which here contains the notes G-A-B-C, implies the key of C major. Once the note C is reached, it is repeated several times (a different number for different appearances of the theme). Then, the xylophone plays the descending pattern C-B-A-G and may repeat the G several times or even go back up the scale. The variations of this theme sometimes make for confusion of the meter. For example, the repeated Gs on beat four of the second measure sound as though they could be the start of a new measure. The xylophone figure is marked "deliberato." The motive sounds banal, but fearful or almost evil in its banality. The xylophone plays this figure in the first section between phrases in the voice part (never concurrently with the voice). The xylophone, after introducing the second stanza of the poem at rehearsal [61] - the beginning of the second section - is completely

silent until the beginning of the third section, after the second stanza of the poem is finished.

At the beginning of the piece this motive is accompanied by woodwinds playing staccato and by strings playing "pesante" and pizzicato or col legno in harmonic intervals of seconds, fourths, thirds, and sixths. In the second and third beat of measure two, the ascending scalar motive is played by the clarinets and second violins divisi at the interval of a sixth in each section. The higher part plays A-B-C$^{\#}$-D while the lower part plays C$^{\#}$-D-E-F$^{\natural}$. The combination of these two lines implies the key of D minor. Thus a tension is created between the tonal area of C, the tonal center for the "Prologue," and D, which was prominent in the inner three movements (Example 34).

The orchestra seldom doubles the vocal line. It often plays notes which are dissonant to those in the voice part during the course of the phrase, but the voice part and the orchestra usually come into a consonant relationship at the ends of the vocal phrases. The chords at these points are sometimes tertian, such as the E^{b}-G^{b}-B^{b} sonority in measure 22 or the D-F$^{\#}$-A in measure 28. In measure 9, the orchestra plays an open fifth, E-B. Some combinations of notes may imply a seventh chord in inversion, such as the C-D-F in the violins in measure 6 (the voice sings an A in the last part of the measure,

Example 34: "Epilogue," mm. 1-5



which completes the chord), or the notes E^{b}-B^{b}-C^{b}-G^{b} in the lower strings and harp in measure 5 - the voice has an accented passing tone, A, on the downbeat, which resolves to B^{b}.

The alto saxophone plays several important lines in the first section of this movement. Its melodic material is based on the descending chromatic theme first introduced in the "Prologue" at the words, "O pride so hostile to our charity." The chromatic melody sounds mournful in this instrument and register. In the third measure of the piece, the alto saxophone enters, molto espressivo, with a syncopated version of the descending chromatic theme, reaching at first from A_3 to $F^{\#}_3$. After going down to the G , the line rises again by half steps up to the A, unlike the usual version of this motive in the cycle. The saxophone comes in with an accent on the second beat of the measure. Britten has also marked the second half of the third and fourth beats with accents. In measure 6, the saxophone enters again with the theme in a triplet rhythm. In measures 7-9, this instrument again plays the motive, incorporating rhythmic elements from both of its previous appearances. This time, however, it begins playing on the second half of beat two, creating an even stronger syncopation and greater rhythmic ambiguity. This time the line reaches down one half step further to the F_3.

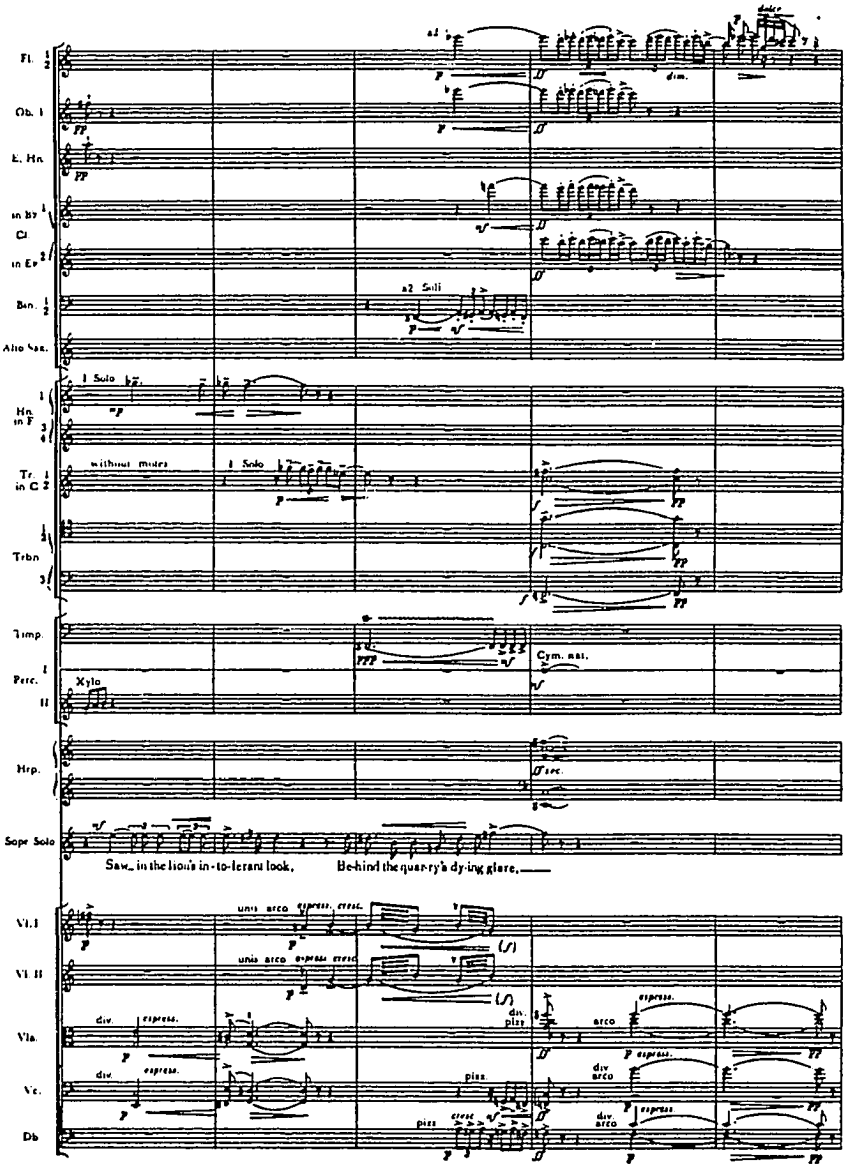
Britten sets the text to follow the natural rhythms of speech, as he did in the "Prologue." The highest notes in the voice part are two G_5s, one on "love" in measure 17, marked piano but tenuto, and the other on "anonymous" at rehearsal [63]. There are many feminine word and line endings in which the voice expressively descends a half-step: "sadness (measure 6)," "creatures (measure 6)," "intolerant (measure 12)," "glory (measure 18)," "predicted (measure 27)" - here Britten gives unity to the cycle by setting this word to the same E^{b}_{5} and D_5 of "deluge" and "earthquake" in the "Prologue" - "suited (measure 29)" and "story (measure 56)."

At measure 11 the vocal line is marked mezzoforte on the words, "Saw in the lion's intolerant look." The voice sings repeated E_5s here, descending by half steps to $D^{\#}$s on the last three syllables. The repeated notes, the crescendo on the last beat of measure 11, the accent mark on the downbeat of measure 12, and the grace note on the following $D^{\#}$ all give the impression of determination and rigidity. At the beginning of this phrase, in measure 11, a solo horn plays two descending half steps, a truncated version of the saxophone's theme in the previous measures of this section. In measure 12, a solo trumpet enters on an offbeat with another variant of the chromatic descending motive in which the line descends first by a minor second and then by a minor third. This variant of

the chromatic descending theme contains the same intervals as the beginning of the ancient chant, "Dies Irae." Upon hearing this trumpet line one might well ask whether Britten consciously fashioned the chromatic descending theme used throughout the cycle with the resemblance to the "Dies Irae" in mind. Certainly the "Dies Irae" theme is appropriate to a song cycle in which death plays such an important role (Example 35).

At "Behind the quarry's dying glare" in measure 13 the orchestra begins to erupt in a small outburst which represents the anger of the animals. The timpani has a tremolo followed by a crescendo and three accented sixteenth notes in the last beat of the measure. In this same measure, the voice rises in dynamics, as do the bassoon and strings. The lower strings and bassoon play versions of the descending chromatic theme. In measure 14, the loud, dissonant brass and harp chords contain the notes F ($E^{\#}$)- C- G-$F^{\#}$ which produce a semitonal crunch of F-$F^{\#}$-G as well as a tritone between C and $F^{\#}$. The clarinets, first oboe, and flutes, marked fortissimo, play the chromatic descending motive in a high register. This motive, like the voice line in measure 11, emphasizes a single note, this time E^{b}_{6}. This figure, writes Christopher Palmer, characterizes the dying quarry with a

Example 35: "Epilogue," mm. 11-15



"squeal like an animal caught in a trap."[88] On "glare" the voice sings an accented $F^{\#}_{5}$, which is the same note that was emphasized in the voice part in "Dance of Death," especially between rehearsal [36] and [38], in a part of the song in which the hunters were raucously calling their birds. Thus, the aggressiveness of the hunters in "Dance of Death" is being mirrored by the angry prey in the "Epilogue."

As has been mentioned, the voice and orchestra often resolve to a consonant sonority at the ends of the phrases in this first section of the piece. On the words "look" and "glare," orchestral instruments double the voice, but there are harmonic clashes within the orchestra. On "look" in measure 12, the voice sings D and the orchestra plays G-$D^{\#}$-D-B^{b}. This combination of notes could connote two chords at once: E^{b} major (if we respell the $D^{\#}$ as E^{b}) and G minor. The voice, as we have noted, sings an $F^{\#}$ on "glare" in beat 4. The lower strings and two bassoons play G-A-$F^{\#}$ in the fourth beat. The violins play G-B tremolos. The timpanist plays $F^{\#}$, and the B^{b} clarinet, the oboe and the flute play E^{b} ($D^{\#}$). The sum of these notes is E^{b} ($D^{\#}$)-$F^{\#}$-G-A-B, a cluster which contains one clash of a minor second and two of a major second.

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[88]Palmer, "The Orchestral Works," in Britten Companion, 400.

At rehearsal [60] (measure 16) the notes are almost the same as those in the first measure of the piece, although the orchestration is slightly different. Peter Evans writes, "the xylophone's banal little figure, . . . and its tonally opposed accompaniment recur unchanged and so with an increasingly chilling vacuity."[89] In measure 17, the voice enters on G_5, marked piano and tenuto, with the word "love" - in the "Prologue," the words "pride" and "charity" (first syllable) had been set on $G^{\#}_5$. The bassoon (measure 17), tuba, and harp (measures 18-19) play versions of the chromatic descending motive. In measure 19, the horns come in dolce and pianissimo with a four-part harmonization of a variant of the "ay me" motive in which the second note of the pattern is one half step higher than the first. On the last beat of measure 20 the voice echoes this motive (here, A_4-B_4-D_5-C_5). In measures 20-23, the alto saxophone plays the chromatic descending theme once again.

At rehearsal [61] the second section of the piece, which sets the second stanza of Auden's text, begins. The notes and orchestration in the first one and a half measures of this section are the same as they were at the beginning of the piece. In measures 24-25, a solo flute plays a line which incorporates two variants of the "ay

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[89]Evans, Music of Benjamin Britten, 72.

me" motive (beats one, three, and four) with the descending chromatic motive. The solo flute plays similar, but not identical material, in measures 28, 30-32, and 44-46. On the last beat of measure 25 the voice enters with the second stanza of the poem.

The tempo speeds up (con moto) at the beginning of measure 26.[90] In the next vocal phrase, the word "guilt" is written with an accent on the note $C^{\#}$, the same note with which the word "German" began and ended in the song "Dance of Death" (measures 219-220 of that piece).

Starting at rehearsal [61], at the beginning of the second stanza of the poetry, the orchestral texture is somewhat thinner than it was for the first stanza. At measure 31, after the word "guilt," there is more activity again. At rehearsal [62], "that human company," the texture once again becomes thinner and simpler. At measure 44 the full orchestra returns to prepare for the climactic vocal phrase, "and be anonymous."

In measure 34, the harp and string basses descend from E^{b} down through D^{b} and C to B^{b} in measure 35 (rehearsal [62]). At this point the string bass section leader plays a B^{b}_{2} and maintains it as a pedal point up through measure 41, at which point the whole section plays

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[90]There is a marking, poco animando, in the voice part in measure 25 in the piano score, but not in the orchestral score, which instead reads "rather animated" in the voice line starting only on the last beat of measure 25.

a diatonic variant of the chromatic descending theme: D^{b}-C-D^{b}-B^{b}. From measure 34 the harp and woodwinds, as well as the solo violin, play predominantly descending lines to prepare for the long descending vocal melisma on "anonymous."

In the second stanza of text, beginning with "Who nurtur'd in that fine tradition," at measure 25 and extending to rehearsal [64], the voice is accompanied at times by the first violin section and at times by the concertmaster alone in a powerfully expressive extended elaboration of the chromatic descending theme. We remember Christopher Palmer's opinion that Britten used the strings most heavily in passages dealing with human emotions and the fact that the strings were also used prominently in "Messalina," the song about the love of human and monkey for each other. Britten wrote this expressive violin passage to accompany the second stanza of the "Epilogue," where Auden writes about the humanizing of the animal world.

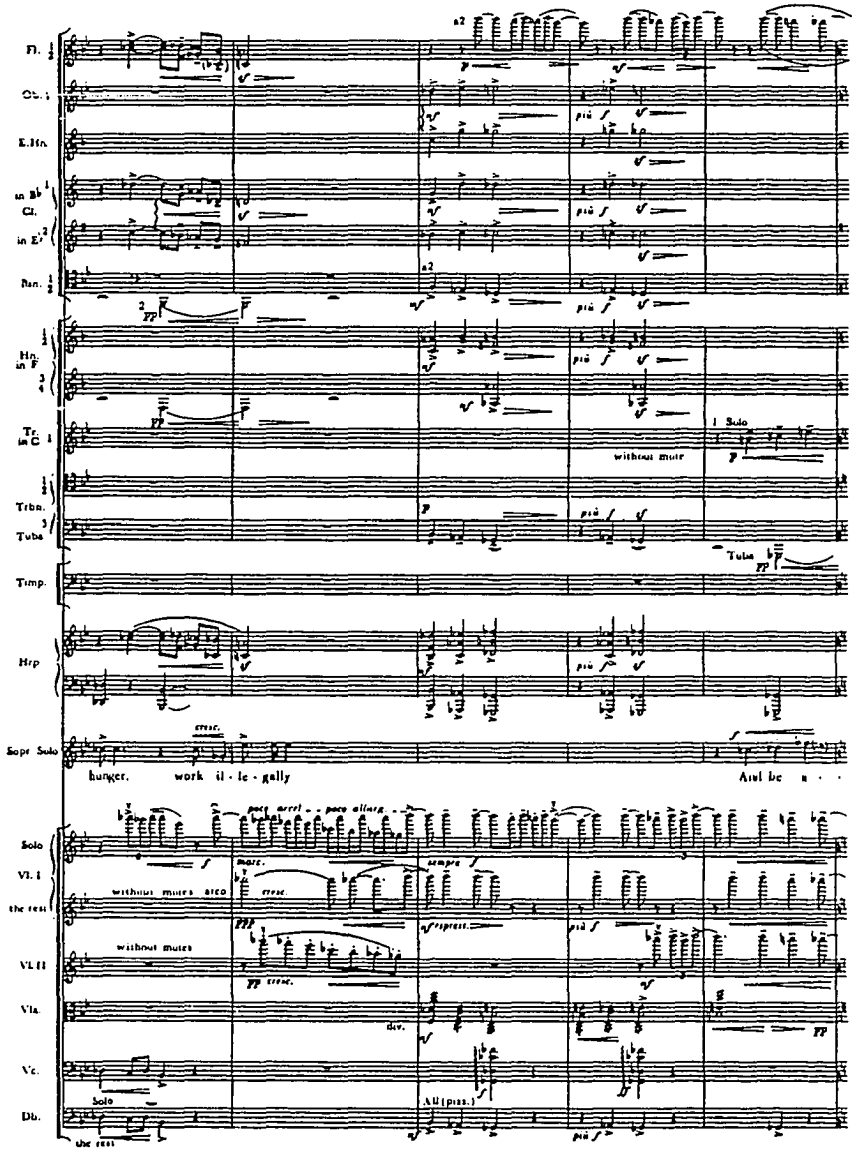
In this long passage, the violin line soars higher and higher. At first the violins keep returning to D_{6}. The highest note of the pattern rises to E_{6} in measure 28, to F_{6} in measure 31, back down to E^{b} in measure 38, back up to G^{b} in measure 39, to A^{b}_{6} in measure 40, to B^{b}_{6} in measure 44, back to G_{6} at rehearsal [63] (measure 45), and F_{6} in measure 50. In measures 50-51, the line rises to

the note A_7 and stops. Sometimes the high note of the phrase is repeated several times before the line descends again. The extent of the descent is quite large in some instances, as in measure 43, where it starts on A^b_6 and goes down to G^b_5. Sometimes the line descends diatonically rather than chromatically (Example 36).

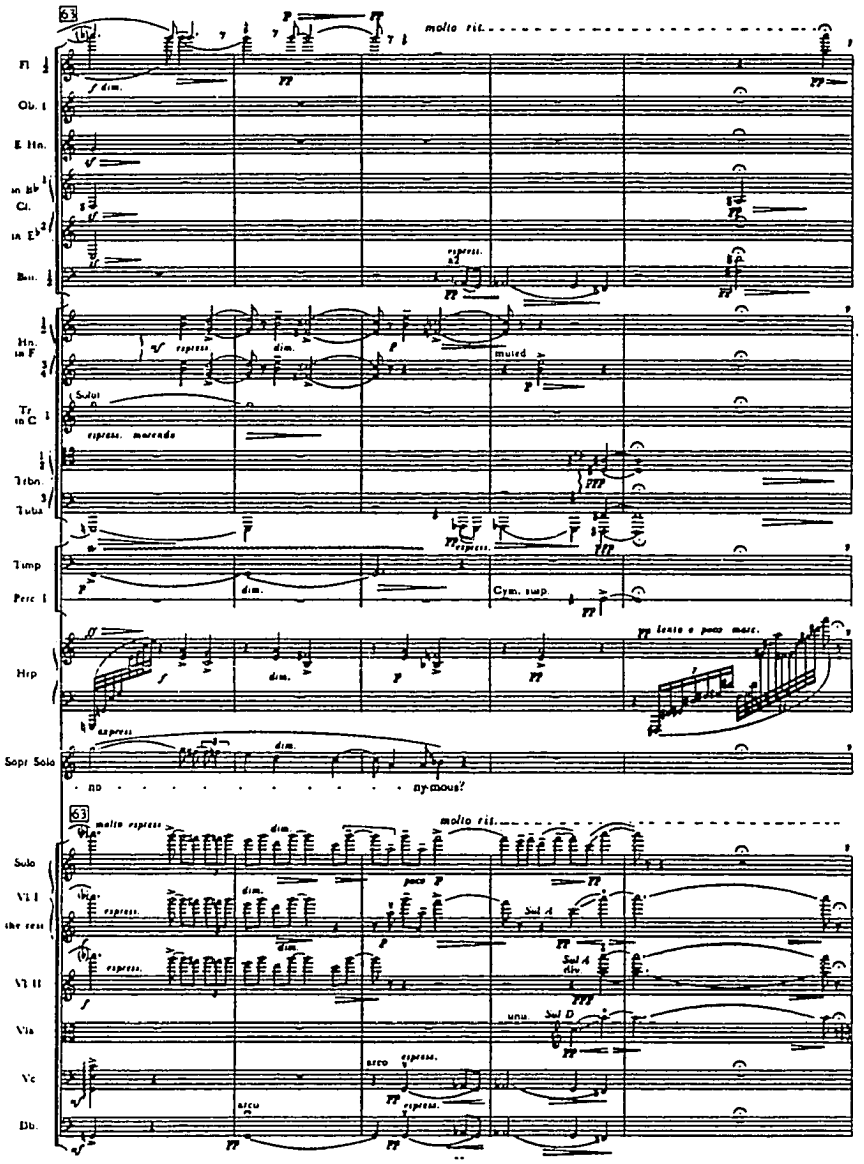
On the word "anonymous" the voice part, marked espressivo, descends, first by half-steps, then by whole steps, then by a minor third to A4 and back up to B^b_4. The voice sings forte in measure 46 and makes a crescendo to a somewhat louder dynamic in measure 47 (rehearsal [63]). The voice line then makes a decrescendo as it descends, depicting the loneliness of anonymity. In measure 50, a cymbal is struck, a traditional harbinger of death.

At measure 51 a harp arpeggio leads into rehearsal [64] and the third section, marked **Tempo I.** Here the xylophone ostinato returns, again punctuating lines in the text at it had at the beginning of the piece. Britten chooses to repeat the first line of Auden's text here, "Our hunting fathers told the story." He sets the final word, "story," to E^b_5 and D_5, the same notes he used for "deluge," "earthquake" and the "poles be(tween which our desire unceasingly is discharged)" in the "Prologue." Britten seems to be implying that we have explored the topic of humans' relationship to animals and to each other

Example 36, part 1: "Epilogue," mm. 42-46



Example 36, part 2: "Epilogue," mm. 47-51



but have not come to any final decision. In a sense, we are back where we had started: we still find ourselves caught between conflicting urges, unable to act with confidence to solve the complicated problems of the twentieth century.

At rehearsal [65], after the voice has finished its final line, the fourth section of the piece begins. Britten has marked here "always rhythmic, but not faster!" The xylophone enters again, playing its scalar and repeated-note figure. This pattern will continue until the last three measures of the piece, when rests finally interrupt its line.

As at the beginning of the "Epilogue," there is harmonic ambiguity. The xylophone ostinato continues in C, but the oboe and violin lines in measure 58 imply D melodic minor. The first oboe and second violin play the rising four-note scalar figure. A chromatic version of this ascending scalar figure appears several times in this section: in measure 60 in the cellos and bassoons; in measure 61 in the clarinets, bassoons and violas; and in measure 62 in the trumpets. The horns in measures 60 and 61 play a syncopated rising scalar figure stretching from B to G and implying G major. In measure 63, the horns play a version of the "ay me" motive, intervallicaly and rhythmically distorted so as to be almost unrecognizable.

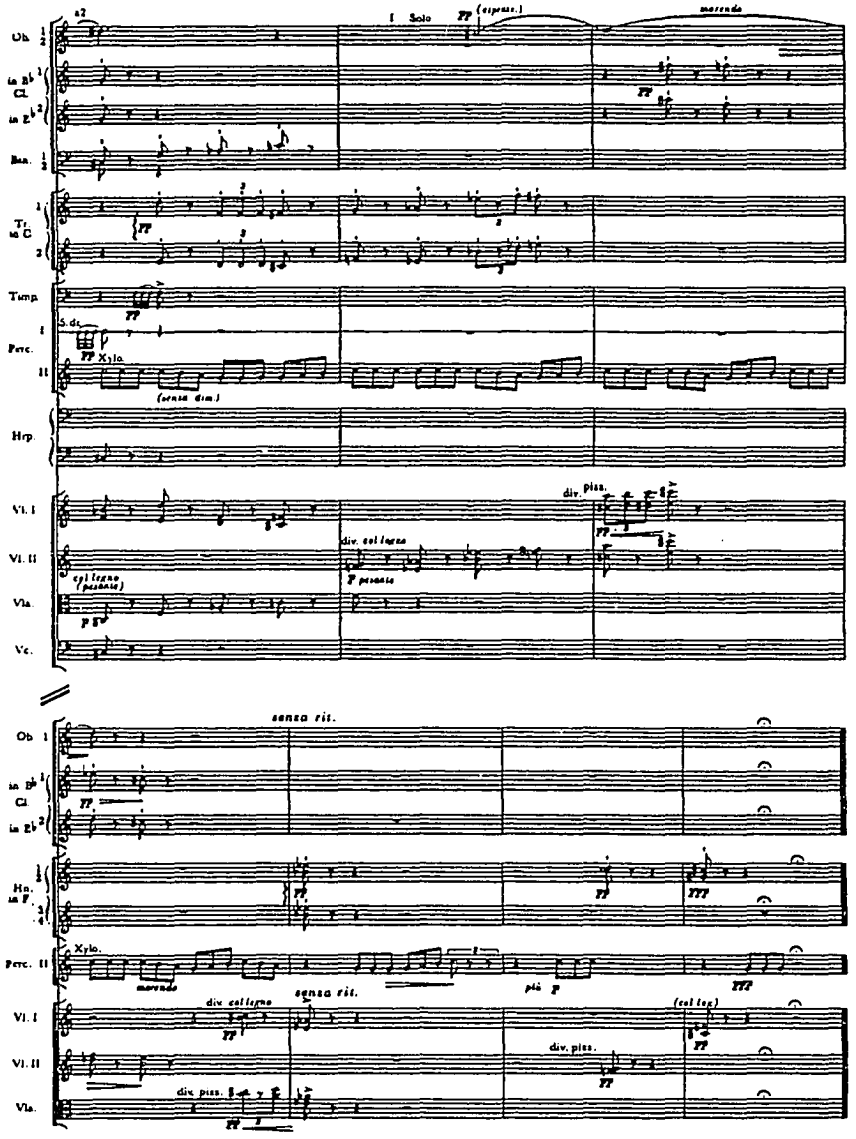
In measure 64, the oboe, flute and piccolo play rising chromatic scales up to $F^{\#}_{5}$, $F^{\#}_{6}$ and $F^{\#}_{7}$, respectively.

The last section of the "Epilogue" starts at measure 66 and is marked alla marcia funebre and sempre molto lento. The xylophone ostinato continues, asserting the key of C major. The flute, piccolo and oboe repeatedly play the motto theme in B major/minor from measure 65 (rehearsal [66]) to measure 76, four measures before the end of the piece. In measures 67, 70 and 71, the harp, tuba and string bass play the melodic tritone B_1-F_2. The trombones in measure 67 and 68 play intervallically compressed versions of the motto theme in diminution. In addition to the triplet xylophone ostinato, there is another almost constant rhythmic pattern of an eighth note plus an eighth rest on every beat of the measure in the harp and string bass, giving this section the quality of a funeral march. Timpani and snare drum rolls add to the effect. The dynamics are muted except for the upper winds which are marked from mezzoforte to forte in measures 67-70.

In measure 77, three measures from the end, the xylophone ostinato stops for a beat and then resumes, only to hesitate again at the top of the scale. In measure 78, the xylophone plays three Cs on the second beat. On the first beat of measure 79, the first and second horns and first violins divisi play $C^{\#}_{4}$ and $F^{\#}_{4}$ against the G in the

xylophone on the second beat. These pitches imply the pitch center of $F^{\#}$ against the pitch center C. The dynamic levels in the last measure are pianissimo and pianississimo. Britten has marked a fermata rest on the last beat of the last measure. Thus, Britten ends this piece without resolving the tonal ambiguity, with a dying away in the rhythm and dynamics and finally a rest. The effect is one of uncertainty and defeat (Example 37).

Example 37: "Epilogue," mm. 76-79



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This dissertation offers a more detailed and more extensive analysis of Our Hunting Fathers than has been published to date. The first chapter provided information on the lives of Britten and Auden to give the reader some perspective on the characters and viewpoints of these two creative artists as well as on the 1930s, the politically turbulent decade in which they lived. This chapter also included information on the steps which Britten took in the composition and performance of the work.

The second chapter comprised a brief overview of Auden's works and style and included information on Auden's use of animals in his works as symbols and as foils for human nature, sometimes in a political context. The commentary on Auden's "Prologue" and "Epilogue" to the cycle included an overview of the meaning and style of the text, drawing on the opinions of established scholars, each of whom had his or her own distinctive interpretations of these difficult texts. The consensus of the authors was that Auden was using the animals at least in part as symbols for the instinctive aspects of the human psyche. In these two poems, Auden depicted

animals, or instinctive nature, as inspiring man to greater achievement. The instinct, however, needs to be tempered by the human attributes of charity and altruism in order for mankind to live in peace. The sections on the inner three poems, "Rats Away!," "Messalina," and "Dance of Death," adapted by Auden from earlier authors, included opinions regarding the meaning and style of each poem. Since source material on these poems was not available, information was provided on the manner in which mankind has looked upon the animals involved in these poems--the rat, monkey, partridge, and kite--throughout various periods in history, especially in Medieval and Renaissance times. Since mankind has traditionally projected certain human traits onto these animals, these poems may be read on one level as comments on the human condition. The section on "Dance of Death," included information on the sport of falconry and on the Medieval Dance of Death. As part of a song cycle written in the 1930s, these poems may be interpreted in the new context as having political implications which the original authors of the texts could not possibly have foreseen.

The third chapter, on Britten's musical setting, began with an overview of Britten's works and style, followed by general comments on the style of the music of Our Hunting Fathers, including examples of several motives which Britten used in more than one song to unify the

cycle. These sections were followed by analyses of the individual songs. Britten's music in the cycle is often sardonic, as in "Rats Away!" and "Dance of Death," and sometimes intensely emotional, as in "Messalina." In "Dance of Death," Britten's setting becomes overtly political when he deliberately juxtaposes two words, "German" and "Jew," not found together in the original poetry. Britten sometimes parodies earlier forms, such as recitative style, hunting songs, and Gregorian Chant. His harmony is largely pandiationic, often using traditional chords, but not leading them to other chords in the traditional manner of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Rather than developing his motives organically, he varies them and juxtaposes them in a discrete manner throughout the music. Britten's use of parody and satire in the music of Our Hunting Fathers pokes fun at the naive beliefs and behavior of earlier generations.

In Our Hunting Fathers, Britten used a modern musical idiom not widely accepted in England at that time. His writing for orchestra and voice was much more demanding than that of other English music of the day, and the texts by Auden are highly intellectual and require study in order to be understood and appreciated. In addition, an element of social and political satire underlies much of the music and the text. These factors

alienated the audience and the critics at the song cycle's premiere and doubtless were responsible for the fact that the song cycle was not publicly performed for many years afterwards. The above-mentioned characteristics also make Our Hunting Fathers challenging to modern-day performers and audiences. It is to be hoped that studies such as the present dissertation will help bring attention to the virtues of this unjustly neglected song cycle and encourage further research on and performances of this important early achievement of one of the century's greatest composers.

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